

ST SILOUAN THE ATHONITE

Archimandrite Sophrony



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ARCHIMANDRITE SOPHRONY

Translated from the Russian

by

ROSEMARY EDMONDS

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Foreword

Revelation concerning God declares, 'God is love,' 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.'ⁱ

How difficult for us mortals to agree with this! Difficult, for both our own personal life and the life of the world around us would appear to testify to the contrary.

Indeed, where is this *light of the Father's love* if we all, approaching the end of our lives, in bitterness of heart can lament with Job, 'My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart . . . If I wait, the grave is mine house . . . Where is now my hope?' And that which from my youth my heart has sought secretly but fervently – 'Who shall see it?'ⁱⁱ

Christ Himself attests that God is concerned for all creation, that He does not ignore a single small bird, that He clothes the grass of the field,ⁱⁱⁱ and His concern for people is so incomparably great that 'the very hairs of our head are all numbered.'^{iv}

But where is this Providence that is attentive to the last detail? We are all of us crushed by the spectacle of evil walking unrestrained up and down the world. Millions of lives that have often hardly begun – before they are even aware of living – are strangled with incredible ferocity.

So whyever is this absurd life given to us?

And lo, the soul longs to meet God and ask Him, 'Why

ⁱ I John iv:8; I John i:5

ⁱⁱ Job xvii:11,13,15

ⁱⁱⁱ cf. Matt. vi:30

^{iv} Matt x:30.

didst Thou give me life? . . . I am surfeited with suffering.
Enveloped in darkness. Why dost Thou hide Thyself from
me? I know that Thou art good but wherefore art Thou so
indifferent to my pain?’

‘Why art Thou so . . . cruel and merciless toward me?’

‘I cannot fathom Thee.’

There lived a man in the world, a man of godly desires. His name was Simeon. He prayed long and his tears were unrestrained: 'Have mercy upon me.' But God did not hearken unto him.

Many months went by in this prayer, until his strength was exhausted. He despaired, and cried out, 'Thou art implacable!' And when at these words something foundered in his soul grown weak from despair, suddenly for an instant he beheld the living Christ. His heart and body were filled with fire of such force that had the vision continued for another instant, he must have expired. Afterwards he was never to forget the inexpressibly gentle, infinitely loving, joyous gaze of Christ full of peace, and during the long years of his life that were to follow he tirelessly bore witness that God is love, love immeasurable, love incomprehensible.

It is of him, this witness to Divine love, that this book will tell.

Since the time of St. John the Divine throngs of such witnesses have proceeded down the nineteen centuries but *this latest is especially dear to us because he was our contemporary*. Often remarked in Christians is the desire – an entirely natural desire – for visible tokens of our faith. Otherwise, hope falters and accounts of miracles in days of long ago take on the nature of myth. This is why the recurrence of comparable testimony is so important; why this new witness is so dear to us, in whom we can see the most precious manifestation of our faith. We know that only a few will

believe in him, just as not many believed in the witness of previous fathers; and this not because the testimony is false but because faith entails ascetic striving.

I have said that the nineteen centuries of Christian history have seen throngs of witnesses to Christ's love. Nevertheless, in the vast ocean of the human race they are so few, so rare.

They are rare, these witnesses, because there is no more difficult, more painful spiritual effort than the ascetic striving for love; no testimony more terrible than bearing witness to love; and no preaching more challenging than the preaching of love.

Consider the life of Christ. He came into the world to bring people the good news of eternal divine life, which He taught to us in simple human terms, in His two commandments of love for God and our neighbour; and the Gospel narratives tell of the temptations He endured from the devil, who did all in his power to force Christ, if only fractionally, to break these commandments, and thereby take away from Him the 'right' to prescribe them to mankind. Look what happened in the wilderness.^v From Christ's answers we see that the contest there concerned the first commandment – love for God. When the winner in the contest, Christ, went forth to preach, the devil surrounded Him with an atmosphere of implacable, deadly enmity, dogging His every step, but not attaining his end in this either. Then the final blows struck at Christ – the perfidy of his disciple-apostle, the general forsaking and the furious cries of the crowd, which had received so much good, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him' – here, too, Christ's love overcomes. He Himself in so many words testifies to this, 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.'^{vi} Also, 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.'^{vii}

^v cf. Matt. iv; Luke iv

^{vi} John xvi:33

^{vii} John xiv:30

And so the devil could not take from Him the right to give the world a new commandment. The Lord was victorious, and His victory abides for all eternity. And now no one and nothing can ever diminish this victory.

Jesus Christ loved the world immeasurably, and it was given to Staretz Silouan effectively to experience this love. In response he conceived love for Christ, and over long years continued in extraordinary ascetic struggle to ensure that no one and nothing should deprive him of this gift, and at the end of his life to say, together with the great Apostle Paul, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'^{viii}

If we pause and consider these words of St. Paul, we realise that he could speak thus only after having gone through all the trials mentioned. And everyone who would follow after Christ, as the experience of centuries has shown, must endure a multitude of trials. Staretz Silouan suffered them likewise.

Blessed Staretz Schema-monk Silouan practised asceticism for forty-six years in the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mt. Athos. The present writer spent some fourteen years in this same Monastery. During the Staretz' last years – from about 1931 until the day of his death (11/24 September 1938) it happened that I was the one closest to him. And now I have been urged to pen his life-story – not an easy mission for one with neither the gift nor the experience of writing. Nevertheless, I have agreed, profoundly and sin-

^{viii}. Rom. viii:35,38–39

cerely convinced as I am that it is my duty to make known to the world this truly great man.

By its content the present book is destined *for a very narrow circle of people* whose interest is concentrated on Christian asceticism, and so my main concern is not to produce literature but to write the most explicit spiritual portrait of the Staretz as possible.

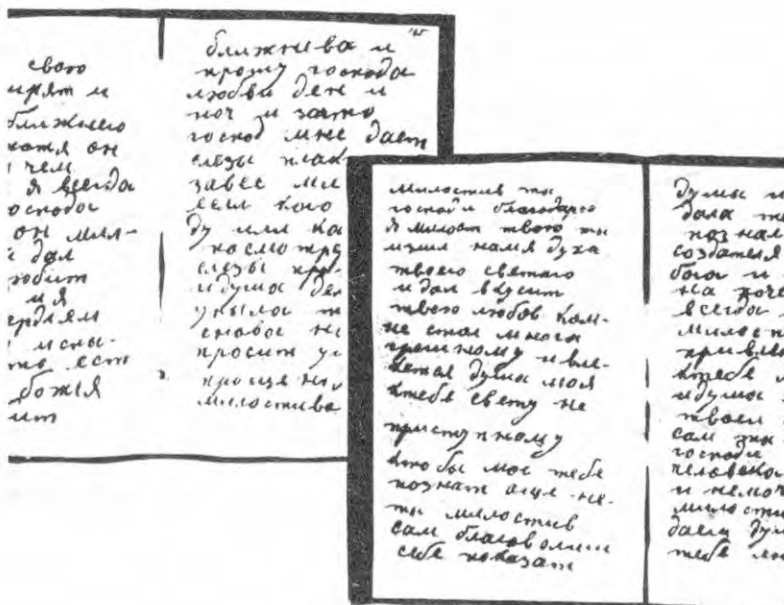
All my attention when I was with Staretz Silouan was taken up with his spiritual person, my one aim being my own spiritual good. There was never any idea of eventually writing his biography, and I remained ignorant of so much that would normally have been of interest to the chronicler. Also, I am obliged to keep silent about much that is connected with people who are still alive. Here I shall give only a few facts concerning the Staretz' life that he recounted on various occasions during our frequent talks, or that I heard from other ascetics on the Holy Mountain, who were friends of the Staretz. I do not think that my scant information touching his outward life presents any essential drawback – I should be quite content to succeed, if only partially, in the more important task, to wit, of portraying the spiritual likeness of the Staretz for those who did not have the happiness of direct communication with him. In so far as I can tell, and judging from my contacts with other people, he was the one soul free of all passion whom it has been given to me to encounter on my earthly way. Now when he is no longer with us, we see him as an extraordinary sort of spiritual giant.

When the Lord lived on earth His humble appearance in the flesh hid from people's eyes His actual Divine majesty. It was only after His Ascension and the coming down of the Holy Spirit that the Divinity of Christ became manifest to the disciples and apostles. Something similar happened to me in regard to Staretz Silouan. In his lifetime he was so simple and accessible that for all my veneration for him, my awareness of his godliness, I still was not altogether conscious of his greatness, and it is only now many years later

during which I have met no one like him, that I begin belatedly to appreciate the very real greatness of the man whom God's providence led me to know so intimately.



SCHEMA-MONK SILOUAN
(+ 11/24 September 1938)



PART I
THE STARETZ' LIFE
AND TEACHING

I

Childhood and Early Years

Outwardly, Blessed Staretz Silouan's life presents little of interest. Up to the time of his military service he lived like any other poor Russian peasant. Then came the usual period as an ordinary soldier in the army, followed by long years – forty-six in all – of the monotonous existence of a simple monk in a community.

The Monastery Register says of him:

Schema-monk Father SILOUAN. Name 'in the world' – Simeon Ivanovich Antonov. Peasant from the province of Tambov, district of Lebedinsk, village of Shovsk. Born 1866. Arrived Athos 1892. Professed 1896. *Schema* 1911. Performed his duties of obedience at the mill, at Kalomar*, at Old Russikon, and as steward. Died 11/24 September 1938.

From 'born' to 'died' – how meagre the picture! Of his exterior life there is nothing to tell, while to touch upon a man's inner life before God may well be prying and indelicate, and to make public the depths of a Christian heart – almost sacrilege. Yet, in the belief that nothing can now dismay the Staretz, who left this world victorious over it – that nothing can now disturb his eternal rest in God – I shall try to relate something of his spiritual biography, so rich and so sublime, for those few who themselves are drawn to the same divine life.

* Kalomar – a large farm belonging to the Monastery of St. Panteleimon in the nearby peninsula of Kassandra.

The battle-ground of the spiritual struggle is, first and foremost, man's own heart; and he who would explore his own heart will appreciate the prophet David's reflection that 'the heart is deep.'ⁱ The real life of the Christian is lived in this deep heart, hidden not only from alien eyes but also, in its fulness, from the owner of the heart himself. He who enters these secret recesses finds himself face to face with the mystery of being. Anyone who has ever given himself over with a pure heart to contemplation of his inner self knows how impossible it is to detect the spiritual processes of the heart, because in its profundity the heart touches upon that state of being where there *are* no processes. But now in writing this profile I find myself faced with just such a task – portraying the evolution of a great ascetic striver.

No, I will not set myself an impossible assignment but just touch upon those stages of the Staretz' life with which I am more familiar. And to a still greater degree I consider that any attempt at scientific psychoanalysis would be out of place, for where God operates, science is not apposite.

Of the Staretz' long life I have retained certain facts in my mind which reveal something of his inner progress and at the same time are part of his 'history'. The first of these goes back to his early childhood when he was not more than four years old. Like many Russian peasants his father always had a welcome for wandering pilgrims. One feast-day with especial pleasure he invited a book-pedlar to his home, hoping to learn something new and interesting – he was irked by his own illiteracy and longed for knowledge. While his guest was given food and drink, young Simeon examined him with a child's curiosity and listened attentively to his talk. The pedlar argued that Christ was not God – indeed, that God did not exist at all. His words, 'Where is this God of yours, then?' particularly impressed little Simeon, who thought to himself, 'When I grow up, I shall go all over the

ⁱ Ps. liv:6.

world looking for God.' As soon as the guest had departed he said to his father, 'You make me say my prayers – but he says there isn't a God!' To which Simeon's father replied, 'I thought he was a wise man but he turned out to be a fool. Don't take any notice of what he said.' But the seed of uncertainty had been sown.

Years passed. Simeon grew into a sturdy lad, and joined an *artel*ⁱⁱⁱ working on Prince Trubetskoy's estate not far from the village. His elder brother was the foreman-builder, Simeon a carpenter. The old country-woman who cooked for the *artel* went on a pilgrimage and visited the tomb of a remarkable hermit, John Sezenov.ⁱⁱⁱ When she returned she told them about the hermit's holy life and the miracles that took place at his tomb. Some of the older men who heard her confirmed what she said about miracles, and everyone agreed that John was a holy man.

As he listened, Simeon reflected,

'If he was a holy man, it means that God is here with us, so there is no point in me going off to search for Him.' And at this thought his youthful heart burned with love for God.

How remarkable that the query planted by the pedlar in the mind of the four-year-old evidently persisted there to worry Simeon until he reached the age of nineteen, when it was resolved in so strange and apparently naïve a manner!

After this, feeling that he had found faith, Simeon clung to the thought of God, praying much and with tears. He became aware of change in himself and felt drawn to the monastic life and, as the Staretz himself said, looked affec-

ⁱⁱ. Group of artisans who lived together, kept a common table and shared the wages for the job which they all worked on. [Tr.]

ⁱⁱⁱ. 1791–1839.

tionately on the Prince's pretty young daughters, without lust, as if they were his sisters, whereas before, the sight of them would unsettle him. He even asked his father to let him go to the great monastery at Kiev. But his father said firmly,

'Do your military service first. Then you will be free to go off.'

Simeon's unusual frame of mind lasted three months. Then he returned to his friendships with the village boys, walked out again with the village girls, drank vodka, played the concertina and behaved, in fact, like all the other lads in the countryside.

Young, strong, handsome, and by this time prosperous, too, Simeon revelled in life. He was popular in the village, being good-natured, peaceable and jolly, and the village girls looked on him as a man they would like to marry. He himself was attracted to one of them and, before the question of marriage had been put, what so often happens befell late one summer evening.

Next morning, as they were working together, his father said to him quietly,

'Where were you last night, son? My heart was troubled for you.'

The mild words sank into Simeon's soul, and in later life when he recalled his father the Staretz would say,

'I have never reached my father's stature. He was absolutely illiterate – he even used to make mistakes in the Lord's Prayer which he had learned by listening in church; but he was a man who was gentle and wise.'

They were a large family – father, mother, five sons and two daughters – all living in affection together. The elder boys worked with their father. One Friday they were out harvesting and it was Simeon's turn to cook the midday meal. Forgetting that it was Friday, he prepared a dish of pork for their lunch, and they all ate of it. Six months later, on a feast-day in winter, Simeon's father turned to him with a gentle smile and said,

‘Son, do you remember how you gave us pork to eat that day in the fields? It was a Friday. I ate it but, you know, it tasted like carrion.’

‘Why ever didn’t you tell me at the time?’

‘I didn’t want to upset you, son.’

Recalling such incidents from his life at home, the Staretz would add,

‘That is the sort of *staretz* I would like to have. He never got angry, was always even-tempered and humble. Just think – he waited six months for the right moment to correct me without upsetting me!’

Staretz Silouan was enormously strong physically, as the following facts will testify. Once when he was still quite young, prior to his military service, after a hearty Easter meal which included a meat course his mother suggested an omelette. He did not refuse – his brothers had gone off to friends – and his mother fried him a whole panful, and he ate it all.

At that time he and his brothers were working on the estate of Prince Trubetskoy, and on public holidays he sometimes went to the local tavern, where he might drink up to three bottles of vodka in a single evening, and not get drunk.

On one occasion when a hard frost had followed on a thaw he was sitting in the inn. One of the patrons, who had spent the night at the inn and wanted to return home, went out to harness his horse but soon came back, saying

‘What awful luck – I must go but I can’t. There is a thick layer of ice all over the horse’s hooves, and the horse is in such pain that it won’t let me break the ice off.’

Simeon said, ‘Come on, I’ll help you.’

In the stable he took the horse’s neck under his arm and said to the peasant, ‘Go on now, break the ice.’ The horse stood the whole time without moving, the peasant broke the ice off its hooves, harnessed it and rode off.

With his bare hands Simeon could take the hot cast-iron pot of cabbage-soup and carry it from the stove to the table,

where the *artel* were having their dinner. With a blow of his fist he could smash a fairly thick plank. He could lift heavy weights, and had a rare resistance to heat and cold. He could eat much and often, and was a hard worker.

But this physical strength, which was later to stand him in such good stead in the accomplishment of many exceptional spiritual feats, now led to his committing his gravest sin, which he afterwards so sorely repented.

The village was celebrating the feast-day of its patron saint. It was in the afternoon and almost all of the villagers were out of doors. Simeon was walking down the street with a friend, playing his concertina. Two brothers, the village cobblers, came towards him. The elder, a great burly fellow much addicted to brawling, was somewhat the worse for drink and when he drew level with Simeon he began to jeer at him, and made to snatch his concertina. But Simeon managed to hand the instrument to his friend and facing the cobbler tried to persuade him to go on his way. But the cobbler, obviously wanting to show off before the village girls who were laughingly watching the scene, went for Simeon. Here, in the Staretz' own words, is what happened next:

'At first I thought of giving in to the fellow but then I was ashamed of how the girls would laugh at me, so I hit him a hard blow in the chest. His body shot away and he fell backwards with a heavy thud in the middle of the road. Froth and blood trickled from his mouth. The onlookers were all horrified. So was I. "I've killed him," I thought, and stood rooted to the spot. At that moment the cobbler's younger brother picked up a large stone and threw it at me. I twisted round and it got me in the back. I turned to him and said, "You want me to do the same to you?" and moved towards him but he ran away. For a long time the cobbler lay where he was. People ran up to help him, bathing him with cold water. It was over half an hour before he was able to rise to his feet, and with difficulty they got him home, where he was bad for a couple of months but luckily didn't

die. For my part, I had to keep on the lookout for a long while – after dark, and at every corner, the cobbler's brothers and their chums would lie in wait for me with cudgels and knives, but God preserved me.'

Thus did the clamour of youth begin to drown the first summons to a monastic life of spiritual striving, but Simeon, chosen of God, was called again, this time by means of a certain vision, which followed on a period of wild living. He had dozed off and was in a light sleep, when he dreamed that he saw a snake crawl down his throat. Feeling sick with revulsion, he awoke to hear a voice saying, 'Just as you found it loathsome to swallow a snake in your dream, so I find your ways ugly to look upon.'

Simeon saw no one. He only heard the voice, extraordinarily sweet and beautiful; but for all its gentleness, the effect it had on him was revolutionary. He was convinced beyond doubt that he had heard the voice of the Mother of God herself, and to the end of his life he gave thanks to her for coming to lift him from his degradation. He would say,

'Now I see how sorry the Lord and His Mother are for people. Imagine – the Mother of God appearing from the skies to show a young man like me his sins!'

The fact that he had not been deemed worthy of actually seeing the Mother of God, he attributed to the state of impurity that possessed him at the time.

This repetition of his original call, occurring not long before his military service, affected the whole course of his future. Renouncing the evil direction his life had taken, which he now began to detest and be ashamed of, he started to repent, and his resolve to enter a monastery, once he was released from the army, returned with redoubled force. An acute sense of sin awoke in him, so powerful that it changed his whole outlook on life, affecting not only his own private actions and attitudes but his extraordinarily interesting conversations with other people, also. Unfortunately, I am only able to repeat some of these – the ones that have remained the most clearly in my memory.

One day there was music and dancing in the village. Looking on, Simeon noticed a middle-aged fellow-villager playing the concertina and dancing. Drawing him aside, Simeon asked him,

‘How can you play and dance like that, Stepan – didn’t you once kill someone?’

Stepan had indeed killed a man in a drunken brawl. He pulled Simeon further on one side, and replied,

‘When I was serving my sentence I prayed and prayed, begging God to forgive me. And He did. That is why I can now play and be happy.’

Simeon, who not long before had himself nearly caused a man’s death, knew what it was to implore God and obtain forgiveness of sins, so he could understand how it was his fellow-villager, a pardoned murderer, could be at peace. We could have no clearer illustration of the Russian peasant’s precise consciousness of sin, his strong feeling of repentance, and his profound religious sense.

Another young man from Simeon’s village came together with a girl from the neighbouring hamlet and got her with child. Seeing how casual was the boy’s attitude, Simeon set about persuading him to marry the girl, ‘because it would be a sin if you didn’t.’ For a long time the youth would not listen, he did not want to marry the girl. But in the end Simeon convinced him and he did so.

When the Staretz told me this story I asked him why he never married the girl he had known. His reply was,

‘When I wanted to become a monk I entreated God to arrange things in such a way that I might do so with an easy mind, and God did. While I was away soldiering a corn-chandler came to do business in our village. Seeing the girl at a village dance and noticing how gay and pretty she was, and how well she sang, he fell in love with her. They lived happily together and raised a large family.’

The Staretz was fervently grateful to God for having heard his prayer. But he never forgot his sin.

Military Service

Simeon did his military service at St. Petersburg, in a Sappers' battalion attached to the Imperial Guard. He went off to his regiment filled with living faith and a deep sense of repentance, and he never ceased thinking of God. He was very popular in the army, earning the reputation of being a quiet and reliable soldier; and his comrades loved him for an amiable and loyal friend.

On the eve of a certain saint's day Simeon set out with three other young guardsmen of his company to spend the evening in town. They went into one of the big, brightly-lit taverns of the capital where a band was playing noisily. Sitting down, they ordered food and drink, and a lively conversation sprang up in which Simeon, however, took little part. He was so silent that one of his companions turned to him and said,

'You're not very chatty, Simeon. A penny for your thoughts!'

'I'm thinking that here we sit in a tavern, eating, drinking vodka, listening to the band and enjoying ourselves, while at this very hour on Mt. Athos they are in church for vespers and will be at prayer all night. And I'm wondering which of us will put up the best defence before God's Judgment-Seat – them or us?'

Simeon's friend exclaimed,

'What a fellow Simeon is! We sit listening to music and enjoying ourselves, while he is on Mt. Athos and at the Last Judgment!'

And the guardsman's suggestion that Simeon was 'on Mt. Athos and at the Last Judgment' was true, not only of that particular moment when they were sitting in the tavern but of the whole period of his military service. That he did think about Mt. Athos is shown by the fact that several times he sent money there. One day he went from the Ustizhorsky camp, where his battalion was stationed in the summer, to the post office in the village of Kolpino, in order to transfer

some money to Athos. On the way back, still quite close to Kolpino, he met a huge mad dog tearing towards him. When the dog had got quite close and was preparing to lunge at him, in panic he cried out, 'Lord, have mercy!' Hardly had he pronounced this brief prayer when some power or other jerked the dog to one side, as if it had run into something. Avoiding Simeon, it ran on to the village, where it did much harm to people and cattle.

This incident made a deep impression on Simeon. He felt a lively sense of God looking after us, and clung even more tightly to constant awareness of Him.

There is another instance of the effectiveness of his influence and good counsel in the course of his military service. One day in the company's quarters he came across a soldier due for discharge who was sitting gloomily on his pallet. Simeon went up to him and said,

'What's the matter? Why do you sit there with your head in your hands instead of being glad, like everyone else, that you've done your time and are off home?'

'I've just had a letter from home,' was the soldier's reply. 'They write that my wife has had a child while I was away.' He was silent for a space, shaking his head. Then in a low voice, in which grief mingled with anger and injured pride, he muttered, 'I'm scared of what I shall do to her . . . That's why I don't want to go home.'

'And you,' Simeon asked him quietly, 'since you left home, how many times have you been in the house down the street?'

'Well . . .' said the soldier, as if he were just remembering, 'there have been times . . .'

'You see, you couldn't wait. Do you think it was easy for her? It's all right for you – you're a man but once is enough to get her into trouble. Remember what you've done. You're more in the wrong than she is. Forgive her. Go home, accept the child as your own and, you'll see, everything will be all right.'

A few months later Simeon received a grateful letter from the soldier telling him how as he had approached his home his father and mother came out to meet him, 'uneasy', while his wife, apprehensive and nervous, waited at the door with the child in her arms. Since Simeon had talked to him at the barracks he had felt quite all right. He greeted his parents happily, then cheerily went up to his wife, took the child and kissed it, too. They all went indoors together, and after that walked round the village visiting relations and friends. And wherever they went he carried the child in his arms, and everything was very pleasant. And since then they had all lived contentedly together.

In his letter the soldier thanked his friend for his good advice. And there is no denying that the advice was not only good but wise, too. So we see that even as a young man Simeon realised that an essential condition for harmony amongst people is that each should recognise his own shortcomings.

At the end of his military service, not long before he and his contemporaries were due to be demobilised, Simeon and the company scribe set off together to see Father John of Kronstadt, to ask for his prayers and blessing. Not finding him at Kronstadt, they decided to leave a letter. The scribe wrote out in his best hand a learned epistle, full of flourishes. Simeon produced these few words:

'Batiushka,^{iv} *I want to become a monk. Pray that the world does not hold me back.'*

They returned to their barracks in St. Petersburg, and on the very next day Simeon began to feel, in his own words, 'the flames of hell roaring' round him.

He went home but stayed only a week, while the villagers made haste to collect linen and other gifts for him to take to the monastery. Then he said goodbye to everybody and set

^{iv}. An affectionate diminutive of the popular word for 'father'.
[Tr.]

off for Mt. Athos. But from the very day that Father John of Kronstadt had prayed for him 'the flames of hell' roared about him, unceasing, wherever he happened to be — in the train, at Odessa, on the boat; and even on Mt. Athos, in the monastery, in church, everywhere.

II

Arrival on Mt. Athos

Simeon reached Mt. Athos in the autumn of 1892. He entered the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon, and started on a new ascetic life.

As is the custom on the Holy Mountain, the new postulant, 'Brother Simeon', had to spend his first few days in complete quiet, recalling all his sins and putting them down on paper, to confess them. The torments of hell through which he was passing gave birth to ardent, unrestrained repentance. Through the sacrament of penitence he wanted to rid his soul of all that burdened her, and so, in no wise justifying himself, he readily made confession of the deeds of his whole life.

The confessor then said to Brother Simeon:

'You have confessed your sins before God. Know now that they have all been forgiven . . . Now we will make a fresh start . . . Go in peace, and rejoice that the Lord has led you to this haven of salvation.'

Brother Simeon's simple, faithful soul rejoiced when he heard the confessor say that all his sins were forgiven him, and he should go in peace. Inexperienced and naïve, he had not yet discovered that the spiritual warrior must be temperate even in his rejoicings, and so he immediately lost the intense concentration of effort which he had known since his visit to Kronstadt. Now physical desire assailed him, his mind dwelt on seductive images, and passion whispered to him to 'return to the world and marry a wife.'

What the young novice endured alone we do not know. When he went to see his confessor, the latter said to him,

‘Never let your mind linger on such suggestive ideas as those, and if they come – drive them away at once.’

His unexpected relapse greatly alarmed Brother Simeon. Conscious now of the terrifying force of sin, he found himself once again in the midst of hell-fire, and resolved to pray ceaselessly till God should have mercy upon him.

Coming after the torments he had lived through, and after his joy at receiving forgiveness in the sacrament of penance, this reappearance of passionate desires pierced his very soul – again he had grieved the Mother of God. He had thought that he was come to a haven of salvation, and now suddenly he saw that here, too, a man might perish.

His first ‘fall’ in thought made Brother Simeon soberly watchful for the rest of his life – how watchful may be judged by the fact that, from the day his confessor instructed him never to harbour wrong thoughts, not once during all the forty-six years of his monastic life did he indulge in a single dissolute imagining. At this first lesson he mastered and assimilated something, which many monks are unable to learn in long years of life. Thus he manifested his true culture and wisdom, for, as the ancient Greeks said, ‘A wise man will not err twice in the same way.’

The bitterness of his remorse occasioned further conflict. Insidious thoughts now bade him, ‘Go into the wilderness, put on sackcloth, and work out your salvation there.’

‘So be it,’ replied Simeon. ‘I will go and ask the Abbot for his blessing.’

‘No, the Abbot will not give you his blessing.’

‘First you try to drive me back to the world, and now you want to get me into the desert . . . If the Abbot will not give me his blessing, it means that you are urging me to no good,’ was Simeon’s retort. And in the depths of his soul he told himself firmly, ‘I will die here for my sins.’

Brother Simeon learned the spiritual life by means of a monastic rule tempered and forged through the centuries and impregnated with constant awareness of God – a rule of

prayer in the solitude of the cell, long church offices, fasts and vigils, frequent confession and communion, reading, physical toil, and the duties of obedience. Simple, untroubled by the hosts of questions which assail present-day intellectuals, he adapted himself to this new way of living, like the other monks, more by an organic fusion with his surroundings than through oral teaching. The instructions of abbot, confessors and *startzy* in most cases are brief, usually consisting of concrete directions on what to do and how to do it.

Newly-arrived postulants are taught that the Jesus Prayer,ⁱ 'told' with the help of a chaplet,ⁱⁱ is the principle prayer for the solitude of the cell. The oft-repeated invocation of the all-holy Name of Jesus delighted Brother Simeon's soul. He rejoiced to know that this prayer can be said everywhere and at all times, whatever one's work or surroundings; that it is good to 'retain' it even during church offices, and that it may take the place of such offices if one cannot be present in church. He prayed much and ardently, for his soul was in anguish, and so he reached up with all his strength to the Saviour.

Brother Simeon spent a short while – some three weeks in all – praying the Jesus Prayer, and then, one evening as he stood before the ikon of the Mother of God, the prayer entered into his heart, to continue there, day and night, of its own accord. But not until later did he realise the sublime and rare gift he had received from the Mother of God.

Brother Simeon was patient, kind and dutiful. They liked him in the Monastery and praised him for his work and good nature, and he enjoyed this. Then the vainglorious thought started occurring to him – 'You are living a holy

ⁱThe text of the Jesus Prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy upon me, a sinner.' [Tr.]

ⁱⁱThe Orthodox ascetic engaged in mental prayer makes use of a chaplet to help him in the daily performance of his rule. (In structure and employment his rosary differs from that of a Roman Catholic.) [Tr.]

life; you have repented; your sins are forgiven you; you pray without ceasing; you perform your obedience properly.'

Long and fervent prayer sometimes brought a measure of peace to Simeon's soul. But then insidious thoughts would whisper, 'You pray, and maybe you will be saved. But supposing you do not find your father or your mother in heaven, or those you love – even there you will have no joy.'

Ideas like these shook the novice and agitated his heart – he lacked the experience to understand what exactly was happening to him.

One night a strange light filled his cell, even piercing his body so that he saw his entrails. 'Accept what you see,' came the insidious suggestion. 'It proceeds from grace.' But his soul was troubled. The prayer within him continued unceasing but the spirit of contrition had gone – so completely that he laughed during the prayer. He hit himself a sharp blow on the forehead with his fist. The laughter stopped but still the spirit of contrition did not return and his prayer went on without it. Now he understood that something was wrong.

After this vision of strange light devils began to appear to him and naïvely he talked to them 'as if they were people'. Gradually their assaults increased. Sometimes they said to him, 'You are holy now,' but at other times, 'You will not be saved.' Brother Simeon once asked one of these devils, 'Why do you contradict yourselves so? Sometimes your cry is that I am holy, and then you say that I shall not be saved.' The devil's mocking answer was, 'We never tell the truth.'

The alternation of these diabolic insinuations, first exalting him with pride to heaven, then hurling him into the depths of eternal perdition, brought the young novice near despair, and he prayed with the utmost intensity. He slept briefly, in snatches. Physically strong – a real Hercules – he did not lie down to sleep but spent all his nights in prayer, either standing or sitting on a backless stool. Only when he was worn out with fatigue did he fall asleep where he sat, for a quarter of an hour or so, and then stand up again and resume his

prayer. So it would continue. Usually he only slept an hour-and-a-half to two hours in the twenty-four.

His first 'obedience' was to work in the Monastery mill. Those were flourishing days for Russian monasticism on Mt. Athos. St. Panteleimon had expanded until it stood like a small city in the surrounding 'desert'. The number of brethren rose to almost two thousand, and from Russia visitors and worshippers came in their hundreds, many of them making a long stay in the Monastery's large hostels. All this kept the mill extremely busy. Yet Brother Simeon, who slept so little and ate so sparingly, who ceaselessly devoted himself to ardent prayer, shedding abundant and at times despairing tears,ⁱⁱⁱ punctually performed the hard work he had been set, each day lifting and transporting a heavy weight of sacks of flour.

Month after month went by and the torturing assaults of the devils never slackened. His spirits began to fail, he was losing heart, while despair and the fear of perdition gained ground. More and more often was he possessed by the horror of hopelessness. Anyone who has gone through something of the kind knows that no mere human courage or power can hold out in this spiritual battle. Brother Simeon foundered and reached the final stages of desperation. Sitting in his cell before vespers, he thought, 'God will not hear me!' He felt utterly forsaken, his soul plunged in the darkness of despondency. Sick at heart, he remained in this black hell for about an hour.

ⁱⁱⁱThe difference between ascetic and 'sensual' [cf. James iii:15] weeping is as radical as that between heavenly and earthly wisdom. For the spiritual warrior emotional tears are an inadmissible weakness but the other form of weeping which comes from on high and accompanies true prayer, when the mind is united with the heart, is essential if the spirit would be lifted up to God. It springs either from love of God, which softens the heart (cf. II Cor. ii:4), or sorrow at separation from God (cf. II Cor. vii). This love and this sorrow may flood a man's whole being, and so lead to 'strong crying and tears' (Heb. v:7).

That same day, during vespers in the Church of the Holy Prophet Elijah (adjoining the mill), to the right of the Royal Doors,^{iv} by the ikon of the Saviour, he beheld the living Christ.

In a manner passing all understanding the Lord appeared to the young novice whose whole being was filled with the fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit – that fire which the Lord brought down to earth with His coming.^v

The vision drained Simeon of all his strength, and the Lord vanished.

There is no describing how it was with Brother Simeon at that moment. From his words and from his writings we know that a great Divine light shone about him, that he was lifted out of this world and in spirit transported to heaven, where he heard ineffable words; that at that moment he received, as it were, a new birth from on high.^{vi} The gentle gaze of the joyous, all-forgiving, boundlessly-loving Christ drew Simeon's entire being to Himself, and then, departing, by the sweetness of God's love lifted his spirit to contemplation of a Divinity beyond all earthly vision.

How remarkable that the simple, untutored novice should immediately have recognised both Christ appearing to him and the Holy Spirit working in him! Again and again in his writings he repeats that he knew the Lord by the Holy Spirit, that he saw God in the Holy Spirit. He also used to declare that when the Lord appears to the soul, the soul cannot help recognising in Him her Creator and God.

Both the flames and the torments of hell which were the prelude to Simeon's vision of Christ, and the Divine light that shone upon him, are certainly beyond the ken and comprehension of most people. What the spiritual man sees or hears, his whole experience, may often seem folly, or the

^{iv}. The doors leading into the sanctuary. [Tr.]

^v. cf. Luke xii:49. [Tr.]

^{vi}. cf. John i:13; iii:3. [Tr.]

fruit of a psycho-pathological state, to the unspiritual man who, ignorant of the reality of the spiritual world, rejects what he does not know. Potentially everyone is called to lead a full spiritual life; but if a man sets his will on material things and physical – or purely intellectual – satisfactions, he becomes blunted and spiritually insensitive. (An analogy that suggests itself – a radio receiver picks up the waves filling the atmosphere, whereas no receiver – no waves.)

Curious and incomprehensible is the spiritual life of the Christian striver. In its web of contradictions we discern assaults of evil spirits, abandonment by God, the darkness of death and the torments of hell, on the one hand; on the other, the revelation of God and the light of unoriginate being.

Words cannot encompass such things.

Every human being is a unique and original phenomenon. Every ascetic's course is likewise original and unique. Nevertheless, the instinct to classify according to one or other indication would have us do so here.

The experience of the Fathers through the centuries suggests three kinds or types so far as the pattern of Christian spiritual life is concerned.

The overwhelming majority of people fit into the first category. Drawn to faith by a small measure of grace, they live their lives in a moderate effort to keep the commandments. Only towards the end, because of the pain they suffer, do they know grace to a somewhat greater extent. A certain number of them do, however, strive harder and finally receive a larger measure of grace. This happens with many monks.

To a second category belong those who, attracted by a relatively small degree of grace, yet zealously wrestle in prayer against the passions, and in this painful struggle know greater grace; and spending the rest of their lives in still more urgent striving arrive at a high level of perfection.

In the third and rarer category belongs the man who at

the outset of his ascetic path, for his fervour, or, rather, because he is foreknown by God, receives great grace, the grace of the perfect.

This last category is not only the most rare but the most difficult because no one – so far as we can judge from the lives and writings of the Holy Fathers, from oral tradition concerning ascetics of latter centuries, and the experience of contemporaries – can retain to the full the gift of divine love, and afterwards for a long while endure the withdrawal of grace and abandonment by God. Objectively, it is not the complete withdrawal of grace but subjectively the soul experiences even the smallest reduction of grace as abandonment by God.

Such ascetics suffer more than all others, since having known grace, having contemplated Divine light, by contrast they feel abandonment by God and the onslaught of the passions incomparably more profoundly, more sharply and acutely – they know WHAT they have lost. Moreover, grace experienced changes man's whole being and makes him immeasurably more sensitive to every spiritual manifestation.

This last category suffers more than all because Christ-like love in this world is subject to an exceptionally harsh 'fiery trial' – in this world Christ-like love is inevitably painful. And here we have Blessed Staretz Silouan, and the explanation of his words, 'You cannot understand my sorrow' and 'He who has not known the Lord cannot seek Him in tears.'

When he describes Adam's inconsolable grief, his weeping when he was driven from Paradise, he is, in fact, speaking of his own sorrow after losing grace.

Simeon's unusually deep repentance makes one wonder how it is that some people repent so profoundly and strongly, others less deeply and still others hardly or not at all. How explain such variations in the recognition of sin?

This is a difficult question to answer. We cannot penetrate

into the mystery of a man's spiritual life. All we are able to do is to observe certain phenomena in the inner life of a religious man when these phenomena have a material expression. We may note certain external characteristics but we can determine nothing of the essence, since the root of each and every Christian psycho-religious fact is the absolutely unrestricted action of the Divine Spirit. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'^{vii}

The second element to escape definition is the freedom of the individual. Christian spiritual life is made up of these two factors – the freedom of the individual and the action of Divine grace.

Both our faith and our repentance are to a certain inscrutable degree dependent on our freedom, as well as being gifts of God's grace. In His love God seeks man in order to give him, not only life but life more abundantly.^{viii} But this more abundant life is not bestowed on free man without his consent. Thus the measure of God's gift to man is subject to man's freedom. God's gifts go hand in hand with a man's ascetic striving, and when God foreknows that man will relate to His gift as he should, then this gift is bestowed without stint. We can say that the reason for a greater or lesser gift is the foreknowledge God has of man's response to the action of grace. St. Paul says, 'For whom he did *foreknow*, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.'^{ix} And again, 'But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son to me . . . I conferred not with flesh and blood.'^x

God foreknew that Simeon would not confer with flesh

^{vii}. John iii:8.

^{viii}. cf. John x:10.

^{ix}. Rom. viii:29.

^x. Gal i:15–16.

and blood but would spend his life in spiritual strivings worthy of an abundant gift, and to such a life He called him.

It is not my intention here to dwell on the mystery of the combination of the absolutely free creative power of the Great Architect of the universe – God – with the freedom of the created being. But my intercourse with the Staretz, who spent his life in a tension of love with freedom pre-eminent, makes me think of God's foreknowledge of man's unconstrained reaction to the summons of His love.

We may presume that few are chosen to bear witness to this love because such witness inevitably entails the sacrifice of one's whole self.

The thought occurs that in the person of Staretz Silouan God was giving the world a fresh example, a fresh statement, of the boundlessness of His love, so that through him, too, men, paralysed by despair, might find fresh courage. In the words of St. Paul, 'Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.'^{xi}

For the Staretz Christ's commandments were not mere moral teaching. He did not debase Christianity to the level of an ethical system, as do the devotees of humanist culture who, lacking genuine religious experience, go so far as to conclude that religion is only a restraining power for the ignorant – unnecessary for themselves. For him the words of Christ meant what they meant to St. Peter, who cried to his Master, 'Thou hast the words of eternal life.'^{xii} He took them as spirit and life. He took them as the Saviour said, 'The words I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.'^{xiii}

For Staretz Silouan Christ's word was the Quickening Spirit, eternal life itself, God in action.

^{xi}. I Tim. i:16.

^{xii}. John vi:68.

^{xiii}. John vi:63.

His faith, after the rebirth described above, affected him radically. He believed that God would judge people, that those who sinned without repenting would go to everlasting torment, while those who did good according to Christ's commandments would inherit the eternal Heavenly Kingdom. Concordantly with St. Maximus the Confessor's absolutely true *dictum* that 'Faith begets awe' (not 'awe begets faith'), Simeon's fervent faith roused in his soul a great dread of being condemned for the many and not insignificant sins which he admitted to himself.

Still, we cannot but wonder at Simeon's unusually profound sense of sin – undoubtedly the gift of grace.

What does the Christian understand by sin?

Sin is primarily a metaphysical phenomenon whose roots lie in the mystic depths of man's spiritual nature. The essence of sin consists not in the infringement of ethical standards but in a falling away from the eternal Divine life for which man was created and to which, by his very nature, he is called.

Sin is committed first of all in the secret depths of the human spirit but its consequences involve the individual as a whole. A sin will reflect on a man's psychological and physical condition, on his outward appearance, on his personal destiny. Sin will, inevitably, pass beyond the boundaries of the sinner's individual life, to burden all humanity and thus affect the fate of the whole world. The sin of our forefather Adam was not the only sin of cosmic significance. Every sin, manifest or secret, committed by each one of us affects the rest of the universe.

The earthly-minded man when he commits a sin is not conscious of its effect on himself as is the spiritual man. The carnal man does not remark any change in himself after committing a sin because he is always in a state of spiritual death and has never known the eternal life of the spirit. The spiritual man, on the contrary, does see a change in himself

every time his will inclines to sin – he senses a lessening of grace.

Staretz Silouan was possessed of unusual fineness of perception, of striking spiritual intuition. Even before the Lord appeared to him – and all the more so after the vision – for the rest of his life he felt sin extraordinarily deeply and powerfully. Sin made his heart ache unbearably, and so his repentance was complete, his tears unrestrainable, until he could feel in his soul that God had forgiven him. To many this may seem strange, exaggerated perhaps, but the Staretz' example is not for everyone.

When repenting of sin he did not merely seek pardon which God is swift to grant – for a single sigh of regret, maybe. He looked for a forgiveness so complete that his soul might really know the grace of God within her again. He prayed for strength if possible never to repeat his sin. He prayed to be delivered from 'the law of sin which is in our members'.^{xiv} The consequences of sin – the loss of grace – he felt so intensely, so painfully, that he dreaded any repetition. Worst of all for him was the feeling that Divine love and the peace of Christ were gone from his soul. Knowing that he had grieved God – God so meek and humble – was unbearable. He suffered the most acute misery when he sinned against Christ's holy love. Anyone on the moral plane who knows love and has sinned against that love – with regard to parents, for instance – knows what unbearable suffering of conscience ensues. But all that happens in the world of human relations is but a feeble reflection of our spiritual relationship with God.

So then, from the beginning of time God 'foreknew' Simeon-Silouan and gave him such a profound and potent knowledge of the essence of sin that he did actually experience the torments of hell, and from this abyss of hell prayed until the Lord inclined towards him and revealed Himself,

^{xiv}. Rom. vii:23.

making known to him, before he tasted of the death of the body, the resurrection of the soul, and letting him 'see the Son of man coming in his kingdom'.^{xv.}

^{xv.} Matt. xvi:28.

III

Monastic Strivings

Brother Simeon's vision of Christ, the most important event of his life, could not fail to bring about the most profound changes in his soul and his consciousness, and have a radical effect on his entire future development. Outwardly, however, there was little change in his daily life. He continued to carry out the same 'obedience' – at the mill – and followed the same time-table as before, in the regular way of the Monastery: the rule to be observed in the cell, long services in the chapel, the working day demanding food, rest, sleep. The agenda is the same for all but each one lives a different life – his own. But if everyone has his own personal life, to a still greater degree did Simeon.

At the moment when God appeared to him his whole being was apprised that his sins were forgiven. The flames of hell which had roared about him vanished. The infernal torments he had experienced during the preceding six months ceased. Now it was given him to know the peculiar joy and peace of reconciliation with God. A rare feeling of love for God and for man, for every man, flooded his soul, while his prayer of repentance and the searing, unrestrainable search for forgiveness, which had not allowed him to close his eyes in sleep, were arrested. (But does that mean that now he could comfortably give himself over to sleep? Of course not.)

During the first period after his vision Simeon's soul, which had known her own resurrection and seen the light of true and eternal being, lived in a state of paschal triumph. All was well – the world was beautiful, people were agree-

able, nature was inexpressibly lovely. Strength seemed to be added to him – his body felt light and no longer a burden – and the word of God rejoiced his soul. Night vigils in church and, more so, prayer alone in his cell, were delightful. Out of the abundance of his joy pity was born in him and he prayed for the whole world.

A little later, one feast-day morning after a night-long vigil in church, grace visited Brother Simeon a second time, as he was serving the other monks at their common meal in the refectory. But now it was less intense, and afterwards its action gradually began to diminish. The memory of what he had known remained but the peace and joy in his heart dwindled away, to be replaced by perplexity and fear of losing what he had had.

How was this loss to be avoided?

The ascetic exertion of vigils, fasting and prayer continues the same, yet light and love dwindle, and the soul is sad and yearns for the Lord Who retires.

There began a pressing search in the counsels of his confessor and the works of the ascetic Fathers for an answer to his increasing bewilderment. The young monk learned that he had been granted a rare and exceptional gift but he could not understand why his mind, which had been filled with the light of the knowledge of God, was growing dark again, obsessed, despite all his efforts to keep the commandments, by those evil spirits which had disappeared after his vision of the Lord.

In his perplexity Simeon went to Old Russikonⁱ to seek counsel from a staretz there, Father Anatoly. When Father Anatoly had heard all that the young monk was experiencing he said,

‘You pray a great deal, don’t you?’

ⁱ Old Russikon lies in the hills to the east, about 250 metres above sea-level and over an hour’s walk from the Monastery. The observance of abstinence there was more severe than at St. Panteleimon. It was a quiet, desolate place which attracted those monks who wanted greater solitude for the sake of mental prayer.

‘Yes, I pray all the time.’

‘Then I think you must be praying in the wrong way, and that is why you so often see devils.’

‘I don’t understand what it means, praying in the right or the wrong way, but I know that we must always pray, and so I pray without ceasing.’

‘When you pray, keep your mind quite free from any imagining or irrelevant thought,’ said Father Anatoly. ‘Enclose your mind in the words of your prayer.’ And he went on to explain what was meant by keeping the mind free, and how to enclose it in the words of prayer.

Simeon stayed some time with Father Anatoly who, at the end of his instructive and profitable discourse, cried out in undisguised amazement, ‘If you are like this *now*, what will you be by the time you are an old man!’

Staretz Anatoly was a patient and seasoned ascetic. He had spent all his long life, as Silouan told me, in fasting and repentance but it was only after forty-five years in the Monastery that he experienced God’s great mercy and came to know the workings of grace. It was natural that he should have been astonished by the young monk but of course he should not have shown his amazement. Therein lay his error – giving the young monk a powerful occasion for vainglory, which he did not yet know how to combat.

Staretz Anatoly’s mistake was not only a pedagogic one – it also went against grace. Heavenly grace does not allow the real ascetic to offer praise to his fellow, who in most cases cannot hear it without detriment. Praise is offered only when someone is falling into despair. We must never – or only with the utmost delicacy – indicate to the ‘left hand’ what God’s right hand is doing with us.

At all events, the young and still inexperienced monk Simeon set out on the most difficult, complex, subtle battle against conceit. Pride and vainglory entail every disaster and downfall – grace departs, the heart grows cold, prayer feeble. The mind is distracted, and wrong thoughts set to work. The soul contemplating another life, the heart that has sav-

oured the grace of the Holy Spirit, the mind that has known purity are unwilling to accept the base thoughts that attack. But how is this to be managed?

Before God appeared to him Simeon did not know how to struggle against wrong thoughts and so he fell into despair, despite perpetual prayer. Afterwards, his soul knew the peace of the grace of the Holy Spirit and his life was all prayer and doxology. But when all this began to recede, the battle with intrusive thoughts set in again. The soul grieves, begs, prays, weeps, battles to retain the Unretainable, but the light, if it does return, will not remain for long. It is not the same as before, and will disappear again. Weary years of alternating grace and withdrawal of grace now set in.

Neither the experience of infernal torment nor the gift of unceasing interior prayer – nor even the vision of the Lord – altogether freed the young monk from assaults of the devil and the struggle against wrong thoughts. In spite of intense prayer his mind was sometimes overcome by visions of demons and the loss of grace. For all his exceptional experience he did not know how to preserve what he had felt during his vision, and it was now impossible calmly to accept the withdrawal of the light.

Staretz Anatoly's advice to stay his mind on the words of prayer did help him a little, but not enough, to purge his mind, and now he was confronted in full force by the ascetic fight against intrusive thoughts.

For the beginner the struggle is not against thinking in general. The outward form that a suggestive thought may take very often prevents one from realising *whence* it has sprung. Often the thought approaches cautiously and when first put into words may seem not only quite natural but wise, too, even holy; and yet sometimes the briefest association with such a thought is enough to affect the soul radically. An intrusive thought, it may be said, must never be judged by its outward form, and only experience teaches us to recognise what force and at the same time subtlety

demonic insinuations may assume. These demonic insinuations can take on the most varied forms. Even when the suggestion appears to be a naturally good one, something alien may have been introduced that essentially affects its spiritual content and influence.

An untoward thought is the initial stage of sin. It is not reckoned as sin, only as a suggestion for sin. Rejecting the thought eliminates any future development of sin.

The Orthodox monk's main concern is to keep the mind at prayer in the heart, and this makes him able to perceive an intrusive thought before it enters his heart. The mind continuing silently entrenched in the heart sees the intrusive thought approaching *from without*, endeavouring to get into the heart, and through prayer drives it off. This – termed 'mental sobriety' or 'mental stillness' – Simeon set out to learn. From the day when, through the blessing of the Mother of God, the Jesus Prayer began to work in his heart, it *never* afterwards ceased. But it was not perfect yet, and could not be, for the passions still remained unconquered. The blessing that Simeon received was great, and it provided a firm basis for his spiritual life but it did not lead directly to perfection. Something more, though similar, happened with him as happens with many others – by their fervent striving they attain to constant prayer but, uncleansed from the passions through long ascetic prayer, despite the action of prayer they fall into sin through the passions. The ascetic striver cannot be satisfied with such a state.

Brother Simeon did not yet know how to keep his mind free from imagining or irrelevant thought. When he prayed he did not exclude imagination, the home ground of devils. Imagination, unavoidable at the start of the spiritual life, brings temptation. Inasmuch as it is inevitable during the preliminary period, it is not regarded then as 'enticement', though the novice gradually progresses from that form of prayer to another which consists of 'enclosing the mind in the words of the prayer'. This is a more difficult, arid type of prayer but correspondingly sounder and less hazardous.

Brother Simeon, though ardently concentrated on God, was simple and naïve. He let imagination play a part in his prayer, which very soon assumed a dangerous form and gave devils the opportunity to tempt the young ascetic. And that strange light that flooded his cell one night and even illuminated his inner being, and the monstrous shapes that showed themselves in the dark, and even in daytime, appeared to him and conversed with him – were all fraught with great peril.

Of course, almost all the holy ascetics knew this combat with demons, and so to encounter them is a normal phenomenon of the path to spiritual perfection; but how many of them suffered from them, how many of them continued mentally ill to the end of their days – went mad; how many people fell into despair and perished; how many suicides, how many crimes have happened in the world as a consequence of demonic spirituality!

Those who have waged this struggle know how cunning and flattering these devils can be, how violent when repulsed. Every time what happened to Brother Simeon happens with a postulant, his spiritual father exercises the utmost attention. The struggle against demons should not cause dismay. Dismay is half-way to defeat, debilitating the soul and rendering her more vulnerable to devilish assault.

Brother Simeon was naïve but valiant. Nevertheless, to continue tranquil in such circumstances is impossible.

From the lives of the Saints and the works of the holy ascetics, from conversations with spiritual fathers and others on the Holy Mountain, the young monk gradually learned to wage a more expert ascetic war, tension never slackening – a feat which may seem impossible to many. As before, he did not lie down but sat on a backless stool and slept in snatches – for fifteen to twenty minutes at a time, which added up to one and a half to two hours in the twenty-four. All day he did hard physical labour; practised inner obedience, setting himself to subdue his own will and learn

total submission to the will of God. He was frugal with food, restrained in conversation and gesture. For long periods at a time he devoted himself to the Jesus Prayer – a feat so fraught with difficulty as to strain a man to breaking-point. Yet, in spite of it all, the light of grace often deserted him, and hosts of devils surrounded him by night.

These alternations between a certain measure of grace followed by abandonment by God and the assaults of devils were not sterile: they kept Simeon's soul alert and vigilant. Unceasing prayer and mental watchfulness, acquired with his characteristic patience and courage, opened new horizons of spiritual knowledge and enriched him with new weapons for the war against the passions. More and more often his mind sought out the vantage-point of attention in the heart whence it could observe the inner world of the soul. By comparing his alternating state and feelings he arrived at a clearer understanding of what was happening to him, and advanced in spiritual knowledge and judgment. He learned how insidious thoughts suggested by the different passions steal upon the soul, just as he learned to understand the workings of grace. He entered upon a life of deliberate inner striving, realising that the main purpose of such striving is the acquiring of grace. How grace is acquired and preserved, and why it forsakes the soul, became one of the supreme considerations of his life.

In his battle to preserve grace the Monk Silouan had recourse to measures that other people might consider inadmissibly harsh – measures that could even give rise to the thought that his ruthlessness with himself was a perversion of Christianity. But this, of course, was not so. The soul that has known God, that has been raised to contemplation of the world of eternal light, and then has lost grace, finds herself in a state unimaginable to anyone ignorant of all this to the same extent. There are no words to express the suffering and sorrow. The soul experiences a peculiar metaphysical pain. This world contains nothing that could captivate one who has seen the light of unoriginate being, who has experi-

enced the fulness, the joy and inexpressible sweetness of Divine love. Somehow earthly life becomes burdensome, joyless, and, weeping, he seeks again the life that was given to him to touch upon. The husband who has lost his beloved wife, or the mother her precious son, can but partially understand the grief of one who has lost grace, since its incomparable beauty and might vastly transcend every sort of human love. This is why St. John Climacus says that the suffering of those who have lost grace exceeds the suffering of men condemned to death or of them that weep over their dead.

The peculiarity of the loss and agony entailed prompts exceptional ascetic striving. (One can imagine the torment of the exhausted soul when her struggle is unsuccessful.) Only rarely, for brief moments, does grace make its presence felt before slipping away again. The soul suffers grievously in the darkness of abandonment by God. Notwithstanding arduous striving to pray without ceasing, the mind is clouded, and devils appear, often at night, troubling the monk and trying to wrench him away from prayer or, at least, not allowing him to pray undistracted. The soul is puzzled, not understanding why it should be so. The monk weeps because of the multitude of his sufferings. His soul grieves, and seeks God, and all round – devils, sombre, shameless, vulgar, wicked, loathsome.

‘Where art Thou, O Lord . . . Why hast Thou forsaken me?’

The grandiose and incomparable experience of our Fathers from generation to generation has shown that only a very few of all those deemed worthy of visitations of grace when they first turned to God stood fast in that spiritual struggle which must follow if grace is to be perfect and enduring. The monk Silouan is to be classed with this minority. Words cannot convey the agony of even a single night of that wrestling for grace in which he spent so many long years. As a rule, he did not like talking about it but I remember him once saying, ‘If in the beginning the Lord had not given

me to know how much He loves man, I could not have survived one of those nights, and yet they were legion.'

It was fifteen years after the Lord had appeared to him, and Silouan was engaged in one of these nocturnal struggles with devils which so tormented him. No matter how he tried, he could not pray with a pure mind. At last he rose from his stool, intending to bow down and worship, when he saw a gigantic devil standing in front of the ikon, waiting to be worshipped. Meanwhile, the cell filled with other evil spirits. Father Silouan sat down again, and with bowed head and aching heart he prayed,

'Lord, Thou seest that I desire to pray to Thee with a pure mind but the devils will not let me. Instruct me, what must I do to stop them hindering me?'

And in his soul he heard,

'The proud always suffer from devils.'

'Lord,' said Silouan, 'teach me what I must do that my soul may become humble.'

Once more, his heart heard God's answer,

'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.'

This brief exchange marked a new and extremely important stage in Father Silouan's life. The means prescribed to him for the attaining of humility were unusual, incomprehensible, to all appearances cruel – but he adopted them with joy and thanksgiving. His heart felt that the Lord was being merciful to him, that the Lord Himself was guiding him. It was no new thing for him to abide in hell – he had dwelt there until his vision of the Lord. But God's direction, 'and despair not' was new. He had reached the point of despair before; and now again, after years of onerous wrestling, after frequent periods of abandonment by God, he had been living through hours, if not of actual hopeless, at least of very similar, anguish. The memory of the Lord he had seen had kept him from complete collapse but his sufferings from the loss of grace were no less grievous. Actually, what he had been experiencing was also a form of despair but despair of

a different kind. In all these years, despite superhuman labours he had not attained his desire, and he was losing hope. And so when he rose from his stool after wrestling for prayer and saw before him a devil expecting adoration Father Silouan felt sick at heart. It was then that the Lord Himself indicated the way to pure prayer.

What was the essence of God's prescription to Father Silouan?

It was not an abstract, intellectual disclosure but an intimation which existentially revealed to his soul that the root of all sin, the seed of death, is pride: that God is humility, and therefore the man who would 'put on'ⁱⁱ God must learn to be humble. Now Father Silouan realised that Christ's supreme, ineffably sweet humility, which he had experienced at the time of his vision, is an inseparable feature of Divine love, of Divine Being. Now he really saw that all ascetic striving must be directed towards acquiring humility.

Now did his soul triumph – triumph after a fashion ignored by the world. It had been given him to know the great mystery of *Being*, to know it existentially. O, how gracious is the Lord – He reveals His mysteries to His humble servant and instructs him in the ways of eternal life! Now Silouan will cling with the whole strength of his soul to the path shown him by God Himself.

A new stage began in the spiritual life of the monk Silouan. His first vision of the Lord had been full of ineffable light, and had brought him a wealth of experience, of abundant love, the joy of resurrection and an authentic impression of transition from death to life. Why then had it withdrawn? Why had it not been a gift of irrevocable character, in accordance with the word of the Lord, 'And your joy no man

ⁱⁱ Rom. xiii:14; Gal. iii:27.

taketh from you'?ⁱⁱⁱ. Had the gift been incomplete or had it been too much for his soul to bear?

Now it became evident, and Silouan realised, why he had lost grace – his soul had lacked both knowledge and the strength to bear the gift. But this time he received the 'light of knowledge'. From now on he began to 'understand the scriptures'^{iv} and perceive the way to salvation. Many of the mysteries in the lives and writings of the Saints and Fathers were revealed to him.

In spirit he penetrated to the heart of the struggle of St. Seraphim of Sarov, who, during a time of loss of grace and abandonment by God after the Lord had appeared to him in church during the Liturgy, stood a thousand days and nights on bare stone in the wilderness, invoking God to be merciful to him, a sinner.

The real significance and force were revealed to him of what St. Pimen the Great meant when he said to his disciples, 'Be sure, children, that where Satan is, there shall I be, also'.

He realised that God sent St. Antony the Great to the Alexandrian cobbler to learn the same lesson – the cobbler taught him to think, 'All will be saved, only I shall perish'.

He understood that St. Sisoë had this in mind when he said to his disciples, 'Who can think St. Antony's thought? I know one man who can'. (He was referring to himself.)

Now he knew what St. Makarios of Egypt meant when he said, 'Descend into thy heart and there do battle with Satan'. He understood what lay before those who became 'fools for Christ's sake';^v and understood the paths trodden by the great ascetics – Vissarion, Gerasimos of Jordan, St. Arsenius, and others.

O, how gracious is the Lord! To His humble servant Silouan He reveals mysteries, opens to him the path of Life – not abstractly but actually – *existentially*!

ⁱⁱⁱ. John xvi:22.

^{iv}. Luke xxiv:45.

^v. I Cor. iv:10.

Silouan came to know experimentally, from the experience of his own life, that the field of man's spiritual battle with evil – cosmic evil – is his own heart. He saw in spirit that sin's deepest root is pride, that scourge of humanity which has torn men away from God and plunged the world in miseries and sufferings innumerable; pride, the seed of death, which has muffled mankind in the darkness of despair. Henceforth, Silouan was to concentrate his whole effort on acquiring the humility of Christ which had been made known to him at the time of his first vision but which he had lost. Transported in spirit into the life of the Fathers, he saw that knowledge of the path to eternal divine life had always lain in the Church, and that by the action of the Holy Spirit this knowledge is handed down through the centuries, from generation to generation.

Many people who come into contact with monks in general and Staretz Silouan in particular see nothing special in them, and so are left disappointed, even disillusioned. This is because their approach is wrong, their aspirations are mistaken.

The monk is perpetually engaged in ascetic striving, often strained to the utmost. But the Orthodox monk is not a fakir. He is not in the least interested in developing, by means of special exercises, peculiar psychical powers which so impress many ignorant devotees of the mystic life. The monk wages a strong, vigorous, obstinate war. Some of them, like Father Silouan, fight a titanic battle (which the world does not know of) in order to slay the proud beast in himself and become a man, an authentic human being in the image of the perfect Man Christ – that is, to become meek and humble.

Strange and incomprehensible to the world is the Christian life. Everything is paradoxical, everything contrary to the ways of the world, and there is no explaining it in words. The only way to understand is by doing the will of God – by observing Christ's commandments. The way He Himself indicated.

The Monk Silouan, after the Lord's revelation to him, set his feet firmly on the spiritual path. From that day his 'beloved song', as he himself said, was to be,

'Soon I shall die, and my accursed soul will descend into the blackness of hell. I shall languish alone in the sombre flames, weeping for my Lord. "Where art Thou, O Light of my soul? Why hast Thou forsaken me? I cannot live without Thee." '

It was not long before this brought peace of soul and pure prayer. But even so fiery a path proved far from brief.

Grace no longer left him as it had before – he was conscious of it in his heart; he felt the living presence of God and was filled with wonder at the Divine compassion. The deep peace of Christ visited him, and the Holy Spirit once more gave him the strength of love. But though he was less blind and foolish now than he had been, though he had emerged from his long and painful struggle a wiser man and a valiant spiritual wrestler, even now he still suffered from the hesitations and inconstancies peculiar to human nature, and continued to weep with unutterable sadness when grace diminished. Another fifteen long years were to pass before he received the power to repel – with a swift signal from the mind (which no outward gesture betrayed) – what before had so shattered him.

In proportion as the visitations of grace grew in strength and duration, so did the feeling of gratitude to God increase in Silouan's soul.

'O Lord,' he would cry, 'how can I give thanks to Thee for this new, inscrutable mercy, that Thou dost reveal Thy mysteries to the ignorant sinner that I am? The world totters in the chains of despair, while to me, the least and worst of men, Thou didst reveal eternal life. Lord, not to me alone: Suffer the whole world to know Thee!'

Gradually, sorrow for the world ignorant of God began to dominate his prayer. 'To pray for people is to shed blood,' said the Staretz, taught of the Holy Spirit Christ-like love.

Christ-like love is blessedness with which nothing in this world can compare but at the same time it means suffering greater than any other suffering.

To love with Christ's love means to drink of Christ's cup, that cup which the Word Incarnate entreated the Father to let pass from Him.^{vi}

The ascetic learns the great mysteries of the spirit through pure prayer. He descends into his inmost heart, into his natural heart first, and thence into those depths that are no longer of the flesh. He finds his *deep* heart – reaches the profound spiritual, metaphysical core of his being; and looking into it sees that the existence of mankind is not something alien and extraneous to him but is inextricably bound up with his own being.

'Our brother is our life,' the Staretz often said.

Through Christ's love all men become an inseparable part of our own individual, eternal existence. The Staretz began to understand the commandment, 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' as something more than an ethical imperative. In the word *as* he saw an indication, not of a required degree of love but of an ontological community of being.

'The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son . . . because he is the Son of man.'^{vii} This Son of man, Great Judge of the world, will say at the Last Judgment that 'one of the least of these' is His very Self. In other words, He assimilates every man's existence and includes it in His own personal existence. The Son of man has taken into Himself all mankind – He has accepted the 'whole Adam' and suffered for him. St. Paul said that we, too, ought to think and feel like Christ – having 'the same mind which was in Christ'.^{viii}

The Holy Spirit in teaching Silouan Christ-like love bestowed on him the gift of effectively living this love, of

^{vi}. Matt. xxvi:39; Mark xiv:36; Luke xxii:42.

^{vii}. John v. 22–27.

^{viii}. Phil. ii:5.

taking to himself the life of all mankind. The intensity of his prayer as he wept for the entire world related and bound him with strong bonds to all mankind, to the 'whole Adam'. It was natural that having experienced his own soul's resurrection he should begin to look upon every man as his eternal brother. In this world there are various distinctions and divisions among men but in eternity we are all one. Each of us must, therefore, take heed not only for himself but for this single whole.

After his experience of the tortures of hell, and after God's prescription for him, 'Keep thy mind in hell', it was particularly characteristic of Staretz Silouan to pray for the dead suffering in the hell of separation from God; but he prayed for the living, too, and for the generations to come. His prayer reached out beyond the bounds of time, and all thought of the transitory phenomena of human life, of enemies, vanished. In his distress for the world it was given to him to divide people into those who had come to know God and those who had not. He could not bear to think that anyone would languish in 'outer darkness'.

I remember a conversation between him and a certain hermit, who declared with evident satisfaction,

'God will punish all atheists. They will burn in everlasting fire.'

Obviously upset, the Staretz said,

'Tell me, supposing you went to paradise, and there looked down and saw somebody burning in hell-fire – would you feel happy?'

'It can't be helped. It would be their own fault,' said the hermit.

The Staretz answered him with a sorrowful countenance:

'Love could not bear that,' he said. 'We must pray for all.'

And he did, indeed, pray for all. It became unnatural for him to pray for himself alone. All men are subject to sin, all 'come short of the glory of God'.^{ix} The mere thought of

^{ix} Rom. iii:23.

this was enough to distress him – in the measure given to him he had already seen the glory of God and known what it was to fall short of it. His soul was stricken by the realisation that people lived in ignorance of God and His love, and with all his strength he prayed that the Lord in His inscrutable love might suffer them to know Him.

To the end of his life, in spite of failing strength and illness, he kept to his habit of sleeping in snatches. This left him much time for solitary prayer, and he prayed continually. The form of his prayer altered according to circumstances but was particularly reinforced at night, lasting till matins. This was the time when he prayed for the living and the dead, for friend and foe, for all mankind.

What did he think about, what did he experience, what did he say to God in those long nights of prayer for the world? Some of his notes enable us to draw nigh to this secret mystery. The words of the prayers are spoken very slowly, one by one, engrossing the whole being. The entire person gathers into a single point. The breathing changes and becomes constrained, or, to use a better term, secret, lest its 'temerity' disturb the projection and concentration of the spirit. The mind, the heart, the body to its very bones are all contracted into this one point. The mind, divested of all images, contemplates the world; the heart immaterially lives the sufferings of the world, and in the heart itself suffering reaches its utmost limit. The heart – or rather, the whole being – is overwhelmed by weeping, is engulfed in tears.

The Staretz' prayers were not prolix, though they went on for a very long time. Indeed, prayer is often wordless, the mind in an act of intuitive synthesis being aware of everything simultaneously. Meanwhile the soul hovers on that brink where one may at any moment lose all sense of the world and of the body, where the mind ceases to think in separate concepts, and where the spirit will be sensible only of God. Then the world is forgotten, supplications die away, and in rapt silence the soul simply dwells in God.

‘When the mind is entirely in God, the world is quite forgotten,’ the Staretz would say.

When, for reasons we do not know, this dwelling in God draws to a close, there is no prayer, but peace, love and profound tranquillity in the soul, together with a certain intangible sadness because the Lord has left, for the soul would wish to dwell in Him eternally.

The soul then lives out what is left of her contemplation.

IV

Portrait of the Staretz

It was during this period of his life that I got to know Staretz Silouan. He had spent long years in titanic struggle against the passions, and was a really noble spirit. Instructed in the Divine mysteries, directed from on high in spiritual warfare, he was already steadily advancing to a state where the passions have been overcome.

Outwardly, the Staretz bore himself very simply. He was above average height, and broadly but not heavily built. He had a powerful neck and strong torso, with well-proportioned limbs and workmanlike hands. Everything about his face and skull was harmonious – a fine forehead, a firm, determined chin (but neither voluptuous nor ruthless). His eyes were dark and not over-large. His gaze was quiet, restful, sometimes penetratingly intent and often weary from long vigil and much weeping. His beard was shaggy, and frosted with white. He had the bushy eyebrows, low-set and straight, common in many thinkers, and dark hair which remained thick even in old age. He was photographed several times but never with much success, his strong, virile features appearing hard and sharp, whereas in reality his peaceful face never gave an impression of severity – from little sleep and much fasting he often looked pale, reduced, not at all severe.

There were occasions, however, when the Staretz was transformed out of all recognition, when his pale, fair countenance was lit by an expression so striking that one could not look at him. One's eyes fell and one found oneself thinking of the Old Testament account of the glory of the face of

Moses, which so shone that the Israelites were afraid to look upon it.

He led a strict, measured life, paying absolutely no attention to appearances, and careless of his body. As a working man he dressed roughly but wore a lot of clothes – after years of completely neglecting his body he caught cold easily and suffered from rheumatism. During his time at Old Russikon he caught a severe chill, and agonising headaches obliged him to lie in bed. At the time he was sleeping outside the Monastery walls, in a large shed which housed all the materials for the work that he was in charge of. He chose this for the sake of greater solitude.

I have described the modest outward appearance of this simple man. But to speak of his character and inner person is far more difficult.

During the years when I was familiar with him he presented an exceptionally harmonious spectacle of spiritual and physical strength.

He was no scholar, having attended the village school for ‘just two winters’, but constant reading of the Scriptures and the works of the holy Fathers, and hearing them in church,ⁱ had developed him considerably and made him, in the monastic sense, an erudite man. His lively mind was quick to grasp essentials, and long experience of spiritual struggle and inner mental prayer, together with the exceptional nature of his sufferings and the Divine visitations he received, rendered him superhumanly wise and acute.

Staretz Silouan had an astonishingly tender, loving heart but his unusual sensitiveness and swift response to every kind of sorrow and affliction were quite free from sentimentality. His constant spiritual weeping never sank into querulous tears, and there is no trace of hysteria in his tireless inner striving.

ⁱ During the night services on Mt. Athos – especially the all-night vigils which last eight or nine hours or longer – the writings of the Holy Fathers are read aloud.

Endowed as he was with a strong and powerful body, his absolute chastity is all the more astonishing. He sternly shunned any thought that might displease God, at the same time mixing freely and without constraint with all sorts of people, turning to them in love and friendship, whatever their state or manner of life – people leading immoral lives arousing no disgust in him, although he was sincerely distressed at their falls, just as parents are distressed by their child's misdoings.

He faced and bore temptation with fortitude.

He was absolutely fearless and free but without any hint of self-assurance. Though afraid of nothing, he lived in awe before God, genuinely fearing to grieve Him if only by an ugly thought. He was that rare and beautiful combination of courage and exceptional meekness.

The Staretz was possessed of real, profound humility – humility before God and other people. He liked to give preference to others but to be unconsidered himself, to greet others before being greeted. He set particular store by the blessings of bishops and abbots, and, indeed, of all in Holy Orders, but he was never obsequious or ingratiating. He had a genuine respect for people of rank and education but no feeling of jealousy or inferiority – possibly because of his profound realisation of the transience of worldly position or authority, wealth or even scholarship. He knew 'how greatly the Lord loveth His people', and his love for God and man made him really value and respect everyone.

Simplicity stamped the Staretz' outward manner but his demeanour did not mask his aristocracy of spirit. Even the most perceptive intuition brought into contact with Father Silouan, whatever the circumstances, could have found nothing ignoble in him. He did not know what it was to spurn or disregard. He was a stranger to affectation. He was a really noble spirit in the way only a Christian can be noble.

The Staretz never laughed aloud, never expressed himself equivocally, never derided or made fun of people. Occasion-

ally a faint smile would cross his quiet, serious face but his lips did not move unless he were speaking.

Anger, as a passion, had no place in his heart, yet for all his astonishing gentleness, rare unassumingness and docility, everything that was false, evil, ugly he opposed absolutely. Backbiting, pettiness, narrow-mindedness and the like found no place in him. When he encountered them he would show himself inflexible, yet contrive not to wound the man guilty of them, either by a visible reaction or, more importantly, by an impulse of his heart – for a sensitive man would feel that, too. This he attained through inner prayer, which kept him serene and unreceptive of any evil.

A rare strong will but devoid of obstinacy; simplicity, freedom, probity and valour together with gentle goodness; humility and obedience without a trace of sycophancy – Father Silouan was a man in the original sense of the word, made in the image and likeness of God.

The world is beautiful – the creation of a mighty God. But there is nothing more beautiful than man, a true man – a son of God.

I was never interested in the events of the blessed Staretz' everyday life. (Maybe I made a mistake there but now it is too late to set things right.) When I was with him my one desire was not to miss out on his spiritual teaching. I wanted my mind to understand, my heart to apprehend, my soul to hold on to and assimilate his word – or rather, his personality, his spirit.

It seemed sometimes that through prayer the Staretz was given the power to influence those who conversed with him. This was all the more essential in that what he said appeared simple, having nothing very special about it, whereas in actual fact it was supra-natural and its spiritual content had to be conveyed through prayer. Otherwise all would be futile – the message would be incomprehensible, unacceptable, hidden.

Talking with the Staretz was always a very simple matter.

There was never any sense of constraint or embarrassment, or fear of blundering, for one felt that whatever one did or said, however clumsy or even absurd, nothing would sever the contact with him or upset its peace, or meet with reproach or sharp response. The heart felt no fear in his presence and, at the same time, one's soul was tautened, as it were, in a devout effort to be worthy to breathe the spirit with which he was filled.

Entering a fragrant place, one automatically expands one's chest to breathe in deeply and fill one's lungs with the fragrance. So it was in the presence of the Staretz – one's soul was possessed of a quiet, peaceful but profound longing to inhale the fragrance of that atmosphere of the spirit of Christ in which it was given him to live.

The Staretz could talk simply, without a trace of vainglory, about matters going beyond the limits of normal human experience, so that if one had faith one could share to some degree, through one of these outwardly simple conversations, in the Staretz' own supernatural state. I remember his account of his meeting with the great Russian ascetic, Father Stratonikos, who came on a visit to Athos from the Caucasus. Father Stratonikos had rare gifts of speech, prayer and tears. In the Caucasus he had lifted many monks and hermits from despondency, and spurred them on to fresh efforts by disclosing to them the ways of spiritual warfare. The ascetics on Mt. Athos likewise welcomed him with great love, and what he said made a deep impression on many of them. His discerning judgment, his fine, vigorous mind, his wide experience and genuine gift of prayer – all combined to make him an outstanding figure in the circle of ascetics. But after a couple of months on the Holy Mountain he began to feel sorry that he had made the long and difficult journey to Mt. Athos, in quest of spiritual edification, for it had apparently been in vain – he had come upon nothing new in his meetings with the monks there. He decided to go and see the father-confessor of the Russian Monastery

of St. Panteleimon, Staretz Agathodoros, and ask him to recommend some father with whom he could profitably discuss the question of obedience, and other matters connected with the monastic life. Father Agathodoros sent him to Old Russikon where at that time – it was before the 1914–1918 war – there were several remarkable ascetics from the Monastery.

Old Russikon was situated high up, some 250 metres above sea level, about an hour and ten minutes' walk to the east of the Monastery. The monastic rule there was stricter than in the Monastery. It was a desert, silent place which attracted monks who sought greater solitude for the practice of mental prayer. Father Silouan lived there at that time, too.

Father Stratonikos received a warm welcome. He had many conversations with the Russikon fathers, both singly and in groups, and one feast-day Schema-monk Father Dositheos invited him to his cell, together with several other monks, including Silouan. The conversation covered a wide range of subjects, and all those present were carried away by what Father Stratonikos said – he was accorded priority not only as a guest but because of his gift of words. Father Silouan, who was the youngest there, naturally sat in a corner, saying nothing but listening attentively to the Caucasian ascetic. When the discussion was over, Father Stratonikos, who had not yet met Father Silouan alone, expressed the wish to call on him in the little hut he had built for himself five or six minutes away from the others, for the sake of seclusion. It was arranged that he should come at three the next afternoon. That night Father Silouan spent in prayer, entreating that the Lord might bless their meeting and discussion.

Father Stratonikos arrived at the appointed hour. The two began talking swiftly and easily, for both of them were set on the same spiritual goal and their minds were wholly preoccupied by the same questions – for them the only vitally important ones.

Listening to Father Stratonikos the day before, Silouan had noticed that he 'spoke from his own mind', and that what he said about the meeting of man's will with God's will, and about obedience, had been obscure.

He began by asking Father Stratonikos the answers to three questions.

'How do the perfect speak?'

'What does surrender to the will of God mean?'

'What is the essence of obedience?'

In all probability the spiritual atmosphere in which Father Silouan dwelt at once affected Father Stratonikos. He sensed the deep significance of the questions and became thoughtful. After a silence he said,

'I don't know . . . You tell me.'

'The perfect never say anything of themselves . . . They only say what the Spirit inspires them to say.'

At this point Father Stratonikos evidently entered into the state of which Father Silouan was speaking. A new mystery of the spiritual life, unknown to him till then, was disclosed to him. He saw his shortcomings in the past. He realised how far he still was from perfection – that perfection which he had sometimes thought to possess because of his obvious superiority over other monks (and he had been in contact with many remarkable ascetics). He cast Father Silouan a grateful look.

Once the first question had been resolved in the depths of his soul by his actually experiencing what Father Silouan meant, thanks to the latter's prayer, it was easy enough for him to master the other two.

After this, the two ascetics broached the subject of prayer. Father Stratonikos said that prayer without tears is not situated aright and does not come from the deep heart, and therefore bears no fruit. To this Father Silouan replied that tears, like all other bodily forces, can dry up but the mind refined by weeping develops a certain subtle awareness of God and, free of all irrelevant thought, can then silently

contemplate Him. And this may be even more precious than tears.

Father Stratonikos went away grateful. Later on he returned several times to see Silouan; and to the end of his sojourn on the Holy Mountain a deep love existed between them. During one of his subsequent visits he confirmed what Silouan had said about prayer. God had evidently suffered him to know that state also.

Not long after this conversation Father Stratonikos left Old Russikon and went to see the anchorite, Father Benjamin, a man of rare nobility with a clever, erudite mind. His whole appearance – facial expression and finely-drawn profile – reflected some silent inner tragedy. Father Stratonikos had visited him before and they had had many a discussion, but this time he was unusually silent and thoughtful. Father Benjamin put some question to him, but in vain. He tried again – still no reply. Finally, stretching out both arms in a somewhat typically theatrical gesture of bewilderment, he cried,

‘What is wrong with you, Father Stratonikos? I don’t recognise you. You were always so mettlesome but now you sit there mournfully, your inspired lips sealed. What is the matter?’

‘How should I answer your questions?’ replied Father Stratonikos. ‘It is not for me to speak. You have Father Silouan, ask him.’

Father Benjamin was surprised. He had known Silouan a long time, and liked and respected him; but he had never thought highly enough of him to turn to him for counsel.

It is possible that at that time Father Stratonikos was going through a very complex experience. On the one hand, he had come to Athos for the good of his soul. On the other, many previous encounters had accustomed him to playing first fiddle. His exceptional dogged asceticism and rare gift of prayerful weeping might have occasioned the thought that he had already attained perfection – and now all of a sudden

his shortcomings were to be shown up by a simple monk who lacked the brilliant talents with which he himself was so richly endowed. Possibly he was silent and saddened because he had not retained the state of mind that he had acquired during his discussions with Father Silouan.

One feast-day when Father Benjamin of Kaliagra and Father Silouan were walking through the monastery woods Father Benjamin suggested that they should go and see Father Ambrosios, a remarkable and well-known *staretz*, who was then confessor to the Bulgarian monastery of Zographou. Silouan agreed at once, and they set off. Father Benjamin was curious to know what Silouan would ask the *staretz*.

‘I am not thinking of asking him anything,’ replied Silouan. ‘I have no problems at the moment.’

‘Then why are you coming?’

‘Because you wanted me to.’

‘Yes, but people go to see a *staretz* for the sake of edification.’

‘I am subduing my will to yours, and that is of greater benefit to me than any advice from the *Staretz*.’

Father Benjamin was astonished. Yet again he did not understand Silouan.

Not long before his demise Father Benjamin left the desert for the Monastery of St. Panteleimon. He was taken ill with dropsy and went into the hospice which the Monastery ran for hermits and homeless pilgrims generally. It was called ‘Peace’, and situated in a large stone building on the sea-shore, outside the gates of the Monastery proper. Next to it was another, smaller building, the store-room which Father Silouan was in charge of. The proximity of store-room to the ‘Peace’ infirmary meant that Father Silouan could often visit and assist Father Benjamin. And Father Benjamin himself was able at first to walk about, though with difficulty, and he often called on his friend.

Shortly after his arrival Father Benjamin was with Father Silouan and they held a long and important conversation

together. It happened that the next day I had to go and see Father Benjamin. I found him still gripped by the discussion he had had with Father Silouan. He kept repeating with unconcealed astonishment and gratitude,

‘What a friend the Lord has given me! . . . You know, he opened up everything to me . . . Then he gave me three instructions – repeated them several times so that I shouldn’t forget, and to conclude added sternly, as if to hammer in a large nail, “If you do not do as I say, then you won’t find salvation.” ’

It was obvious that the encounter with Silouan had been a great revelation to Father Benjamin. It had happened on the Monday, the first day of the Apostles’ Fast, when the Monastery rules ordained that nothing was to be eaten before evening, but Father Silouan poured him out some tea and himself drank a glass. And this insignificant detail Father Benjamin noted as an indication of Father Silouan’s freedom from forms – not because he scorned them but because he was above them. Father Benjamin knew of Silouan’s great temperance.

I was with Father Benjamin for about an hour during which he could think or speak of nothing else, and kept repeating,

‘What a friend the Lord has given me!’

So it was only towards the end of his life that he recognised what Silouan was – formerly he had treated him in a very friendly fashion though somewhat condescendingly, like a good monk but still a junior. It was the same with the other monks on the Holy Mountain, who came to appreciate Father Silouan only after his death.

St. Panteleimon is a very large monastery, and complicated to run. The different branches are managed by monks who are called stewards. Owing to their duties these stewards cannot always fit into the general schedule of the Monastery, and so there is a special table for them in the refectory, where each takes his meals when he can. Father Silouan was a

steward for many years, and on weekdays he used to eat at this table.

Among the stewards was a certain monk, Father P., who was outstandingly capable, yet somehow always unlucky – his initiatives usually met with no sympathy among the fathers, and his undertakings often ended in failure. One day, after such an enterprise had resulted in disaster, he was subjected to sharp criticism at the stewards' table. Father Silouan was present with the others but took no part in the 'prosecution'. Then one of the stewards, Father M., turned to him and said:

'You are silent, Father Silouan. That means you side with Father P. and don't care about the interests of the Monastery . . . You don't care about the damage he has caused the community.'

Father Silouan said nothing, quickly finished eating and then went up to Father M., who by that time had also left the table, and said to him,

'Father M. – how many years have you been in the Monastery?'

'Thirty-five.'

'Have you ever heard me criticise anyone?'

'No, never.'

'Then why do you want me to begin on Father P.?'

Disconcerted, Father M. replied shamefaced:

'Forgive me.'

'God will forgive you.'

When Father Silouan was first appointed steward by the Abbot he returned to his cell and prayed fervently that the Lord would help him to fulfil the duties of his responsible task. After long prayer his soul heard the answer:

'Preserve the grace given thee.'

Then he understood that to preserve grace is more important and precious than anything else, and so on embarking on his new 'obedience' he unwearingly saw to it that his prayer should not be interrupted.

There were up to two hundred workmen under his orders in his new office. In the morning he would go round to the workshops, giving the foremen general instructions for the day. Then he went back to his cell to weep for the 'people of God'. His heart ached for his labourers. He shed tears for each one of them.

'There's Mikhail who left his wife and children back in their village to come and work here for a pittance. What must it be like for him so far from home, from his wife and little children? And newly-married Nikita, who had to come away from his pregnant young wife and elderly mother? As young as that, and a dear son and husband – what must they have felt when they let him go? Gregory now – he left his old parents, his young wife and two little babes, and came here to toil for a crust of bread . . . and how much does he earn here? How poor they must all be to have to leave their families like that! How wretched they must all be! And what misery must be theirs! And the appalling poverty of every one of them! Look at Nicky now, still only a boy – what grief it must have caused his parents to let him come so far away, to live among strangers, for the sake of a beggarly wage! How their hearts must ache! . . . Oh, the poverty and misery of the people! And all of them like abandoned sheep – nobody cares about them, to look after them and teach them something. No wonder they take to all manner of vice, and grow rough and wild . . .'

So said the Staretz to himself; and his soul suffered for all the poor folk – no doubt more than they suffered themselves, for he saw in their lives what they in their ignorance were not aware of.

Heart speaks to heart, runs the old saying. The Staretz prayed in secret for the 'people of God' but they 'sensed' and loved him. He never hung over them, never drove them hard, yet they worked better and more cheerfully for him than for anyone else. The other stewards were primarily concerned for the economic interest of the Monastery and who does not know that when economic interests predomi-

nate, the individual is overlooked. The Staretz believed that the interests of the Monastery, the real interests, lay in keeping Christ's commandments.

'The Lord pities all men,' he would say: and he in his turn, filled with the spirit of Christ, was sorry for all. Looking at the world around him, recalling memories of the past and his profound personal experience, he lived the suffering of the people, of the whole world, and his prayer knew no end. He prayed mightily for all the world. He would forget about himself. Pity made him want to suffer for people. He yearned to shed his blood for their peace and salvation, and this he did in prayer.

'Praying for people is to shed blood,' he would say.

(No need to underline what prayerful tension and weeping these words express.)

I once asked the Staretz, 'Doesn't being steward and having to live among so many people make inner silence difficult?'

'What does inner silence mean?' he replied. 'It means ceaseless prayer, with the mind dwelling in God. Father John of Kronstadt was always surrounded by people, yet he was more with God than many solitaries. I became steward in an act of obedience and because of the Abbot's blessing I can pray better at my task than I did at Old Russikon where out of self-will I had asked to go for the sake of inner silence . . . If the soul loves and pities people, prayer cannot be interrupted.'

Father Silouan's attitude towards those who differed from him was characterised by a sincere desire to see what was good in them, and not to offend them in anything they held sacred. He always remained himself; he was utterly convinced that 'salvation lies in Christ-like humility', and by virtue of this humility he strove with his whole soul to interpret every man at his best. He found his way to the heart of everyone – to his capacity for loving Christ.

I remember a conversation he had with a certain Archi-

mandrite who was engaged in missionary work. This Archimandrite thought highly of the Staretz and many a time went to see him during his visits to the Holy Mountain. The Staretz asked him what sort of sermons he preached to people. The Archimandrite, who was still young and inexperienced, gesticulated with his hands and swayed his whole body, and replied excitedly,

‘I tell them, Your faith is all wrong, perverted. There is nothing right, and if you don’t repent, there will be no salvation for you.’

The Staretz heard him out, then asked,

‘Tell me, Father Archimandrite, do they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is the true God?’

‘Yes, that they do believe.’

‘And do they revere the Mother of God?’

‘Yes, but they are not taught properly about her.’

‘And what of the Saints?’

‘Yes, they honour them but since they have fallen away from the Church, what saints can they have?’

‘Do they celebrate the Divine Office in their churches? Do they read the Gospels?’

‘Yes, they do have churches and services but if you were to compare their services with ours – how cold and lifeless theirs are!’

‘Father Archimandrite, people feel in their souls when they are doing the proper thing, believing in Jesus Christ, revering the Mother of God and the Saints, whom they call upon in prayer, so if you condemn their faith they will not listen to you . . . But if you were to confirm that they were doing well to believe in God and honour the Mother of God and the Saints; that they are right to go to church, and say their prayers at home, read the Divine word, and so on; and then gently point out their mistakes and show them what they ought to amend, then they would listen to you, and the Lord would rejoice over them. And this way by God’s mercy we shall all find salvation . . . God is love, and therefore the preaching of His word must always proceed from love. Then

both preacher and listener will profit. But if you do nothing but condemn, the soul of the people will not heed you, and no good will come of it.'

One day the Staretz had a conversation with a young student visiting Mt. Athos who talked a great deal about freedom. As always he listened gently to the ideas and experiences of his lively, nice but naïve visitor. Naturally, the latter's conception of freedom meant political freedom on the one part and, for the other, being able to follow the dictates of one's heart.

In reply, the Staretz explained his own ideas and aims.

'Who doesn't want freedom?' he said. 'Everyone does but few know what freedom consists of, and how to attain it . . . To become free, one must first of all "bind" oneself. The more you bind yourself, the more freedom your spirit will know . . . One must pinion the passions in oneself, so that they don't get possession of you, restrain yourself so as not to harm your neighbour. People generally seek freedom in order to do what they like. But that is not freedom but the power of sin over you. Freedom to fornicate, overeat and get drunk, or be spiteful, use violence and kill, and so on, is certainly not freedom but, as the Lord said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin".ⁱⁱ One must pray hard to be delivered from such bondage.

'We believe that true freedom means not sinning, in order to love God and one's neighbour with our whole heart and our whole strength.

'True freedom means constant dwelling in God.'

Though what the Staretz said was too profound for the youth to grasp; though what he said was apparently very simple, the young student left deeply impressed.

I have kept some notes that I made about a conversation

ⁱⁱ. John viii:34. [Tr.]

between the Staretz and a monk who visited him on March 18/31 in 1932.

The Staretz was saying that the experience of the Holy Fathers shows various ways of combating intrusive thoughts but it is best of all not to argue with them.

The mind that debates with such a thought will be faced with its steady development, and, bemused by the exchange, will be distracted from remembrance of God, which is exactly what the demons are after – having diverted the mind from God, confuse it, and it will not emerge ‘clean’.

Stephen the Hermit (out of whose hands a leopard fed) as he lay dying disputed with intrusive thoughts, as was his wont, and so found himself struggling against devils.

St. Mark of Thrace for having tried to comfort his soul before departing from this life by enumerating his efforts was kept swinging in the air ‘for an hour’ – which suggests that it could have been for all time.

Other Fathers were more discriminating in their spiritual struggle.

St. Makarios the Great, flying through space, never ceased humbling himself, and when devils, outdistanced, cried to him from afar that he had escaped them, he replied that he had not yet evaded them. He answered after this fashion because he was accustomed to stay his mind in hell, and thereby really did elude the devils.

St. Pimen the Great, schooled by long experience of battle against devils, knowing that far the most dangerous and powerful enemy is pride, fought all his life to acquire humility, and so said to his disciples, ‘Be assured, children, that where Satan is, there am I also’. But at the bottom of his heart, knowing how good and merciful is the Lord, he trusted that He would save him.

To humble oneself in this wise is the best means of keeping one’s mind pure from every passionate thought. However, many monks fail to understand this, and are unable to think thus, and so they despair, incapable of staying their minds in hell and at the same time having faith in the Lord’s mercy.

Paying no heed to alien thoughts, with all our mind and strength we must cling to God and cry, 'O Lord, I am a sinner and unworthy of Thy mercy but do Thou of Thy compassion save me' . . .

Often for a single flash of doubt in God's mercy – 'Well, and supposing the Lord does not forgive me?' – the soul loses much. Despair is worse than anything – it is blasphemy against God, as if God were incapable of saving us, as if the scale of our sins could transcend the measure of Divine compassion. He took upon Himself all the sins of the whole world . . . If a mother can forgive her child's every mis-doing, because it has not yet attained the age of reason, so even more does the Lord forgive us if we humble ourselves and repent . . .

The spiritual struggle has much in common with ordinary warfare; and in this battle we must likewise be brave. Spiritual courage consists in having firm faith in God's mercy. Even if the soul falls into sin or is tempted and thrust off the right path, even bows down to the devil – if she does not panic but immediately, trustfully, turns to God in repentance, the courageous soul thereby vanquishes her enemies; whereas the cowardly soul is disconcerted, despairs and so perishes . . .

When one slips off the right path and falls into delusion, it is essential, first of all, to confess to one's spiritual father, telling him everything. After such confession the delusion will moderate, and then, though not immediately, total reform will ensue.

Many go astray but, alas, not many are reformed.

Many receive grace to begin with but very few get it back after losing it.

The monk then asked the Staretz, 'What made St. John Kolovosⁱⁱⁱ pray that his passions might return to him?'

To which the Staretz replied,

'By fervent repentance St. John Kolovos early overcame

ⁱⁱⁱ. 4th Century [Tr.]

his passions but he did not receive the gift of love and prayer for the world. When he was left in peace his prayer weakened and so he started to pray for the return of his passions because in wrestling with them he dwelt in ardent, ceaseless prayer. But had he achieved prayer for the world, after overcoming his passions, he would not have needed to pray for them to tempt him anew, for I do not think that a man can be in pure contemplation of God, or eager prayer for the world, and at the same time wrestle with the passions.'

The monk then asked him,

'Why did the same Elder advise St. Pimen the Great to allow into his heart thoughts from without and there wrestle with them, whereas he told a less experienced brother to cut off such thoughts instantly?'

Staretz Silouan replied,

'Certain Fathers, as this advice shows, did adopt this method of allowing thoughts from without to enter into the heart so as to wrestle with them there; but here we have two possible situations – the first where a man does not know how to preserve his mind, and the intrusive thought forces its way into his heart, and only then does the struggle begin. This is a game at which one can lose. The second is when a monk allows a thought to enter into his heart, not through weakness but deliberately, in order to examine every aspect of its action. But neither expedient permits one to continue in contemplation, and therefore it is better not to admit such thoughts at all but to pray quietly with a pure mind.'

That inexperienced monk received the advice instantly to reject intrusive thoughts, and not enter into conversation with them, because he was weak and could not have withstood a passionate idea. But in spite of the Elder's counsel he still could not hold them at bay, as one must, and the Elder's prescription was only the prelude to his learning the difficult science of battling against such thoughts. St. Pimen, now, was stronger and more experienced in spiritual warfare. All the same, it is better to preserve the mind from all intrusive thoughts, and to pray with all one's soul, because

the man who prays with a pure mind receives enlightenment from the Lord.

‘How is it possible to keep the mind pure?’ asked the monk.

‘The Holy Fathers have left us their teaching on the prayer of the mind-in-the-heart. Such prayer preserves the mind, and I see no other means of enabling one to keep God’s commandments.’

Often young people would consult Staretz Silouan on the career they should choose. Some he advised to take up theology with a view to entering the ministry; to others he gave his blessing to the studies they had embarked on, which he advised them to combine with prayer and monastic temperance. Others still were counselled not to pursue learning but to devote themselves wholly to prayer and a life of spiritual and ascetic discipline. This latter was a counsel he very rarely gave as, in his opinion, the day was approaching, that Father Stratonikos had foreseen, when many erudite men would live as monks in the world. He thought that circumstances in general were becoming unpropitious for the form of monastic life that existed in ancient times but that the vocation and yearning for monasticism would always exist.

The Staretz was utterly convinced that the spiritual life – that is, the ascetic life of prayer and profound faith – was nobler than every other way, so that the man to whom it had been given should for its sake – as for a pearl of great price – set aside all else, even learning.

He believed that if the spiritual man were to abandon the ascetic life and turn his mind to learning, he would show greater capacities as a scholar than the man less talented spiritually – in other words, that the man with mystical gifts, living the life of the spirit, inhabits a higher, nobler plane than the man whose province is learning in the sphere of logical thought; and since the spiritual man has a higher form of existence, he will, on descending to a lower plane, show greater talent there, though perhaps not immediately, than

the non-spiritual person. The Staretz said that 'the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light',^{iv} not because they are wiser in actual fact but because 'the spiritual man is absorbed by God and has little time to spare for worldly matters'.

In discussions with me the Staretz often spoke in abstract terms but with monks he expressed himself very simply, giving concrete instances in order to be understood.

'Why is it surprising that the non-spiritual man should arrange his affairs better than the spiritual man? The one thinks about his affairs, whereas the other tries to stay his mind in God. It is often like this in the world – the clever merchant laughs at the scholar because the latter does not understand buying and selling but this certainly does not mean that the merchant is more intelligent . . .'

Let me tell here of one or two typical exchanges with the Staretz:

In 1905 Father Silouan spent several months in Russia, often visiting monasteries. On one of his train journeys he sat opposite a shopkeeper, who in a friendly gesture opened his silver cigarette-case and offered him a cigarette. Father Silouan thanked him but refused to take one. Then the shopkeeper began talking, asking, 'Are you refusing, Father, because you think it is a sin? But smoking is often a help in life. It relaxes you, and makes a few minutes' break. Smoking helps one to get on with one's work or have a friendly chat, and in general . . .'

And so on, trying to persuade Father Silouan to have a cigarette. In the end Father Silouan made up his mind to say to him, 'Before you light up a cigarette, pray and repeat one "Our Father. . . ." ' To this the shopkeeper replied, 'Praying before having a smoke somehow doesn't work.' To this Silouan observed, 'So better not start anything which cannot be preceded by untroubled prayer.'

And soon after the end of the First World War (in 1918)

^{iv}. Luke xvi:8.

at the Monastery of St. Panteleimon it was decided to buy a steam engine for the saw-mill and turn to account the Monastery forest. The steward, Father F., a capable, naturally-gifted Russian, pleased with the machinery after it had been installed and set to work, began to praise German genius (the machine was of German make). Extolling the Germans, he inveighed against Russian boorishness and ineptness. Father Silouan, who in his free time went to give a hand with the felling, listened in silence to Father F.. Only in the evening when the working monks sat down to supper did he ask Father F.:

‘What do you think, Father F., why do the Germans know how to make machinery and so on better than Russians?’

In reply Father F. started praising the Germans again, as more efficient, cleverer, more talented, ‘whereas we Russians are no good at anything.’

To which Father Silouan remarked, ‘But I think there’s an altogether different reason rather than Russian inaptitude. It seems to me that Russians give their first thought to God and pay little attention to earthly matters. But if Russians, like other peoples, did devote themselves to earthly matters, and engaged only in them, they would soon overtake the others, since that is less difficult.’

Some of the monks who were present, knowing that there is nothing on earth more difficult than prayer, agreed with Father Silouan.

St. Panteleimon is one of the largest and best-organised monasteries on the Holy Mountain. It has a splendid library of over 20,000 volumes, which include not a few ancient Greek and Slavonic manuscripts, and many priceless old books of rare bibliographical value. There are important theological and historical sections, and so on. The Monastery’s well-appointed guest-rooms often housed visitors, mainly foreigners, who were put in charge of Father V., a trained theologian who spoke several foreign languages.

In 1932 a Roman Catholic doctor of theology, Father

Chr.B., came on a visit. He and Father V. had many a discussion about life on the Holy Mountain, and one day he asked,

‘What books do your monks read?’

‘St. John Climacus, St. Abba Dorotheos, Theodore the Studite, St. John Cassian, Ephraim the Syrian, Barsanuphius and John, Makarios the Great, Isaac the Syrian, Simeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, Maximus the Confessor, Hesychius, Diadoch, Nilus and other Fathers from the *Philokalia*,’ replied Father V.

‘Your monks read those books! . . . With us it’s only professors who do,’ said the doctor in open astonishment.

‘They’re in constant use among our monks,’ replied Father V. ‘They read other works, too – the Holy Fathers, and modern ascetics like Bishop Ignatii Brianchaninov, Bishop Theophan the Recluse, St. Nilus Sorsky, Paissy Velichkovsky, John of Kronstadt, and so on.’

When Father V. repeated this discussion to Staretz Silouan – whom he deeply respected – the Staretz remarked,

‘You could have told the doctor that our monks not only read these books but could themselves write their like . . . Monks do not write because there are masses of fine books which satisfy them. But if these books were somehow or other to disappear, then the monks would write new ones.’

During his long life on Mt. Athos the Staretz encountered numerous great ascetics, some of whom had experienced the states described by many grand ascetics such as Isaac of Syria, Makarios the Great and others, so what the Staretz said seems quite natural.

For many years the Monastery’s large sewing-workshop was run by Father Diadoch. An exemplary monk in every way, meticulous to the last detail, a lover of the divine office, erudite, of gentle disposition, he was held in respect by all. One year on his feast-day I went to see him and found him talking with some of his spiritual friends, a father-confessor,

Father Trophim and Staretz Silouan. The father-confessor was relating something he had read in the newspaper and, turning to Staretz Silouan, he asked,

‘What do you think about that, Father Silouan?’

‘*Batiushka*, I don’t care for newspapers with their news.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because reading newspapers clouds the mind and hinders pure prayer.’

‘How odd,’ said the father-confessor. ‘For my part I find just the contrary – newspapers help me to pray. We live here in the wilderness, seeing nothing, and gradually the soul forgets the world and becomes shut up in herself. Prayer then slackens . . . But when I read the newspapers I see how it is with the world, how people suffer, and that makes me want to pray. Then, whether celebrating the Liturgy or praying alone in my cell, I entreat God for all mankind, for the whole world.’

‘When the soul prays for the world,’ said Father Silouan, ‘she knows better without newspapers how the whole earth is afflicted. She knows what people’s needs are and feels pity for them.’

‘How can the soul know of herself what goes on in the world?’

‘Newspapers don’t write about people but about events, and then not the truth. They confuse the mind and, whatever you do, you won’t get at the truth by reading them; whereas prayer cleanses the mind and gives it a better vision of all things.’

‘I don’t quite see,’ said the father-confessor.

We all waited for Staretz Silouan to reply but the Staretz sat in silence, head bent, not suffering himself to explain in the presence of a father-confessor and older monks how the soul can, in spirit, know the life of the world and the needs and tribulations of men when, remote from all things, she prays for the universe.

Father Silouan, who was deemed worthy of knowledge which is granted to scarcely one man in a generation, was

too unassuming to do more in general conversation than give an intimation of what he thought; and because of this his great wisdom and quite exceptional experience often escaped the notice of those who talked with him. When he saw that his interlocutor did not grasp his first words, the Staretz usually made no attempt to 'explain' things which are first and foremost the fruit of experience – and his spiritual sobriety would not permit him to disclose his experience. Thus during his lifetime he remained 'unrecognised'. There is no doubt that this was not only God's will for him but his own desire, too, which God accepted and fulfilled, concealing him even from the monks of the Holy Mountain. Yet not altogether – Staretz Silouan did not remain entirely hidden. There were monks and others (visitors to Athos or people who corresponded with him) who esteemed and loved him deeply, among them bishops and theologians as well as pious laymen.

I remember a certain Orthodox foreigner who came for a long stay in the Monastery. The Staretz made a profound impression on him. He grew fond of him and often went to see him. The other monks knew of this, and one day, meeting the foreigner in a corridor of the Monastery, Hieromonk N. of the Council of Elders, one of the most influential members of the Community, remarked to the visitor,

'I can't understand how a scholar like you can take pleasure in going to see Father Silouan, an illiterate peasant. Haven't we anybody cleverer than that?'

'It needs a "scholar" to understand Father Silouan,' was the rather pained reply.

Why 'educated men' revered and went to see Staretz Silouan remained a mystery to this same Father N., and in conversation with Father Methodios, who ran the Monastery bookshop for many years, he remarked,

'I wonder why they go to him. After all, he reads nothing.'

'Reads nothing but fulfils everything, while others read a lot and fulfil nothing,' was Father Methodios' comment.

V

The Staretz' Doctrinal Teaching

In addition to what has already been related, the Staretz' own writings tell of other events in his life, so let us now study his teaching – although, in fact, he never set out to teach. My idea at this point is to try and sum up what I learned during my years with him. It is impossible to explain how and why I came to believe in the Staretz but perhaps it will not be out of place to say something of my approach to him.

Our talks very often arose out of my needs, my turning to him. Much of what we discussed does not appear in his writings. When I turned to him with questions, or simply listened to him, I recognised that he spoke out of experience granted from on high, and I looked upon his words to a certain extent as the Christian world looks upon the Holy Scriptures which impart truths as acknowledged and sure facts. What the Staretz said was not the fruit of the workings of his own brain – it expressed actual experience and the knowledge of experience, and was therefore a positive testimony to the realities of spiritual being. Searching for logical truths was alien and superfluous in his eyes, as irrelevant as for the Scriptures. Like St. John the Divine he would say, 'We know'.¹ Take the following from his writings:

'We know that the greater the love, the greater the sufferings of the soul. The fuller the love, the fuller the knowledge [of God]. The more ardent the love, the more fervent the prayer. The more perfect the love, the holier the life.'

¹ I John iii:14 *et seq.*

Each of these four propositions could have been the precious culmination of complex philosophical, psychological and theological research but the Staretz had no need of such arguments and did not descend to them.

I have already said that contact with the Staretz was of an absolutely exceptional character. It seemed to me that in his conversations, simple as was their form, Father Silouan was able, by the strength of his prayer, to transport his interlocutor into an especial world. The most important thing about this was that the one talking with him was introduced into that world not theoretically but actually, through an inner experience transmitted to him. True, so far as I know, hardly anybody was afterwards able to retain and live out in his own life the state which had been made known to him in conversation with the Staretz. Of course, this was an endless source of grief to them for the rest of their lives, for the soul cannot but sorrow when light once seen is lost. Still, it would be yet more tragic, more desperate, not to have known the light at all, and even – which is often to be observed – have no inkling of its existence. From what I have heard of Father Stratonikos from ascetics who knew him on the Holy Mountain, we may suppose that it was for this reason that he was at one and the same time grateful to the Staretz for the revelation he received, and sorrowful because he recognised his own inability to preserve what he had experienced. I do know that many who had run eagerly to the Staretz for guidance afterwards fell away because they found themselves unable to live in accordance with what he said. His counsel was simple, quiet and kind; but to follow it one has to be as unsparing of oneself as was the Staretz. That firmness of purpose is required which the Lord demands from his followers – a resolution amounting to self-hatred.ⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ cf. Luke xiv:26.

Discovering the Will of God

The Staretz used to repeat, 'It is good at all times and in all things to ask God for understanding of what to do or say, and in what manner'. In other words, on every occasion without exception we should seek to discover God's will and the way to perform it.

The quest to know God's will is the most important thing in a man's life, since when he happens on the path of the will of God he becomes incorporate with divine, eternal life.

There are various ways of acquiring this knowledge of God's will. One is through the word of God – through the commandments of Christ. But the Gospel commandments for all their perfection – or rather, by virtue of their perfection – express the will of God in its over-all, ultimate sense, whereas man in his everyday life is confronted with an endless complexity of situations, and very often does not see what to do to comply with God's will.

For our actions, our deeds to end well, it is not enough just to have a general idea of the Divine will as expressed in the commandments – 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself'.ⁱⁱⁱ We still need God to show us how to give effect to these commandments in our life. Even more – *strength from on high* is vital.

The man who has love of God in his heart, prompted by this love, acts in accordance with dictates which approximate to the will of God. But they only approximate – they are not perfect. The unattainableness of perfection obliges us all continually to turn to God in prayer for understanding and help.

Not only perfect love but complete knowledge is beyond our reach. An act performed, it would seem, with the very best intention often has undesirable and even evil conse-

ⁱⁱⁱ cf. Mark xii:30–31.

quences, because the means employed were bad, or simply mistaken. We often hear people justifying themselves by saying that their intentions were good, but good intentions are not enough. Life abounds in mistakes of this kind. That is why the man who loves God never ceases to beseech Him for understanding, and keeps a constant ear for the sound of His voice in him.

In practice, the process is as follows: every Christian, and in particular every bishop or priest, when faced with the necessity of finding a solution consonant with the will of God, makes an inner rejection of all his own knowledge, his preconceived ideas, desires, plans. Freed of everything 'of his own', he then turns his heart to God in prayer and attention, and the first thought born in his soul after such prayer he accepts as a sign from on high.

Such search for the knowledge of God's will through direct invocation in prayer leads man, especially in need and distress, 'to hear God answering him in his heart', as the Staretz used to say, 'and he learns to interpret God's guidance'. Thus must we all of us learn to discern the Divine Will. And if we fail, we shall never find the way.

This process in its more perfected form is preceded by the practice of constant prayer in which the mind is stayed in the heart. But in order to hear the Divine voice more surely in himself, man must cast off his own will and be prepared for every sacrifice, like Abraham – even like Christ Himself, Who, in the words of St. Paul 'became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.'^{iv}

The man who adopts this course will succeed only after he has learned by experience how the grace of the Holy Spirit operates; and when fierce self-denial has taken root in his heart – that is, if he has resolutely determined to deny his own petty individual will in order to acquire and fulfil the holy divine will. Then the real significance of Staretz Silouan's query to Father Stratonikos, 'How do the perfect

^{iv}. Phil. ii:8.

speak?' will be disclosed to him. The words of the Apostles and Holy Fathers, 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us',^v will sound natural. He will better understand the passages in the Old and New Testaments which tell of similar direct conversations between the soul and God, and he will have a truer conception of the manner in which the Apostles and Prophets spoke.

Man is created in God's image and likeness, and is called to fulness of direct communing with God. All men, therefore, without exception, should be treading this way but in fact experience shows that such is by no means a path for everyone. This is because most people neither hear nor understand God speaking in their hearts: they listen to the urging of passion, which inhabits the soul and with its clamour drowns the still small voice of God.

In the Church another course lies open to us – to seek out and obey the counsels of a spiritual father. This is what the Staretz himself did, considering the humble path of obedience to be the most trustworthy of all. He firmly believed that because of the faith of the one who turned to him, the spiritual father's counsel would always be right, beneficial, pleasing to God. His confidence in the efficacy of the sacraments of the Church and the grace of the priesthood were the more confirmed after, one night in Lent on Old Russikon, during Evensong, he saw the spiritual father, Staretz Abraham, transfigured 'in the image of Christ' and 'ineffably radiant'.

Filled with blessed faith, he lived the mysteries of the Church in reality but I remember he thought that on the psychological plane, too, it was not difficult to see the advantage of obedience to a spiritual father. He used to say that when a father-confessor answers a question in the performance of his ministry he is at that moment untouched by the passion influencing his inquirer, and so he can see more

^v Acts xv:28.

clearly, and is more easily accessible to the action of God's grace.

A spiritual confessor's reply will usually bear the imprint of imperfection but this is not because he lacks the grace of knowledge but because perfection is beyond the strength and grasp of the one inquiring of him. Notwithstanding its inadequacy, the spiritual instruction, if accepted with faith and effectively heeded, will always lead to an increase of good. This process is often subverted because the inquirer, seeing before him an 'ordinary man', hesitates, loses his faith a little, and so does not accept the *first* word of his spiritual father and raises objections, putting forward his own opinions and doubts.

Staretz Silouan discussed this important matter with Higoumen Archimandrite Missail (d. 22 January 1940), a spiritual man favoured and manifestly blessed by God.

Father Silouan asked the Higoumen,

'How can a monk find out the Divine will?'

'He must accept my first word as the will of God,' said the Higoumen. 'Divine grace rests on him who does so but if he resists me, then I, as a mere mortal, will back down.'

The idea behind Higoumen Missail's reply is this:

When asked for counsel a spiritual father prays to God for understanding but he answers in his capacity as man, according to the measure of his faith. 'I believed, and therefore have I spoken,' wrote St. Paul^{vi.} but 'we know in part, and we prophesy in part'.^{vii.} When a spiritual father gives advice, or tells a man what to do, he himself is anxious not to sin and is on trial before God. The moment, then, that he meets with an objection, or even some inner resistance, on the part of his inquirer, he does not insist or presume to affirm that what he was saying was the expression of God's will. In his position as man, he withdraws.

This conception Higoumen Missail expressed very clearly

^{vi.} II Cor. iv:13

^{vii.} I Cor. xiii:9.

in his life. On one occasion he summoned a novice, Father S., and laid a complicated, difficult task of obedience on him. The novice readily accepted and, bowing low, moved to the door. On a sudden the Higoumen called him. The novice stopped. Lowering his head on his chest, the Higoumen quietly but meaningfully said,

‘Father S., remember, God does not judge twice, so when you do something in obedience to me, it is I who will be judged by God but you will not be called to account.’

When anyone objected, even if only mildly, to some commission or instruction from Higoumen Missail, that generally strong-minded ascetic personality, in spite of his post as administrator, would usually reply, ‘Well, all right, do as you like’, and did not repeat his injunction. And Staretz Silouan, likewise, when he met with resistance, would fall silent.

Why is this so? On the one hand because the Spirit of God suffers neither violence nor argument. On the other, because the will of God is too great a matter to be contained or receive perfect expression in the words of a spiritual father. Only the man who accepts these words of his spiritual father with faith as being pleasing to God, who does not submit them to his own judgment, or argue about them, has found the true path, for he genuinely believes that ‘with God all things are possible’.^{viii.}

This is the way of faith, discerned and confirmed in the millennial experience of the Church.

To speak of these matters which constitute the unconcealed mystery of Christian life, yet surpass the bounds of our indolent everyday existence and generally limited spiritual experience, is never without risk, because many may misunderstand and wrongly apply the message. And then, instead of good, harm may result, especially if the ascetic life is entered upon with prideful self-confidence.

^{viii.} Matt. xix:26.

When the Staretz was approached for spiritual counsel he was unwilling, he would refuse, to provide an answer of his own. He remembered St. Seraphim of Sarov's words, 'When I spoke my own idea, I made mistakes,' adding that the mistakes might be slight but they could be grave.

The spiritual state which he spoke of to Father Stratonikos – 'The perfect never say anything of themselves . . . they only say what the Spirit inspires them to say' – is not always accorded even to those approaching perfection, just as the Apostles and other Saints did not always work miracles, and the Spirit of prophecy did not operate in equal measure in the Prophets, speaking out powerfully at times, at others silent.

The Staretz made a clear distinction between the 'word of experience' and direct inspiration from on High – the word of the Spirit. The former is precious but the latter, loftier and more trustworthy.^{ix} Sometimes he would voice the will of God definitely and with confidence, telling his inquirer that the will of God was that he should do thus and thus. At others, he would answer that he did not know God's will for him. He would say that sometimes the Lord does not disclose His will even to saints, because the one who approached them did so with a false and deceitful heart.

According to the Staretz, the prayer of the one who prays fervently may suffer many vicissitudes – struggle against the enemy, battle with self, with the passions, with people, against the imagination; and in these cases the mind is not pure and nothing is clear. But when pure prayer comes, when the mind united with the heart silently stands before God, when the soul is conscious of grace within herself and is given over to the Divine will, unhindered by the action of the passions and the imagination – then prayer heeds the inspiration of grace.

When someone lacking experience sets out on this path – the quest for the Divine will through prayer – who cannot

^{ix} cf. I Cor. vii:25.

‘by the taste’ distinguish with any certainty between the action of grace and the manifestation of the passions (of pride, in particular), then it is absolutely vital to have recourse to a spiritual father, and when confronted with each and any spiritual phenomenon or insinuation to adhere strictly to the ascetic precept, ‘neither accept nor reject’, until one’s spiritual father pronounces his ruling.

By ‘not accepting’ the Christian guards himself against the danger of mistaking demonic machinations for Divine inspiration, and thus ‘giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils’,^x and rendering divine homage to demons.

By ‘not rejecting’ one avoids another peril – namely, attributing divine action to demons and so falling into the sin of ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’, like the Pharisees who declared that Christ ‘doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils’.^{xi}

The second peril is more dreadful than the first, since the soul may become accustomed to rejecting grace, to detesting it, and grow so used to resisting God that she will thus define herself on the eternal plane, so that her sin ‘shall not be forgiven . . . neither in this world, neither in the world to come’.^{xii} Whereas the soul that promptly recognises her wrong-doing, through repentance attains salvation, for no sin is unforgivable except the sin that is not repented of.

There is much that needs saying concerning this extremely important ascetic rule – ‘neither accept nor reject’ – and how the ascetic puts it into practice but since the object of the present book is to set out only basic propositions and not go into detail, I will return to my earlier theme.

In its more perfect form, knowledge through prayer of the Divine will is a rare phenomenon conceivable only after much effort, prolonged experience of struggle against the

^x. I Tim. iv:1.

^{xi}. cf. Matt. xii:24.

^{xii}. cf. Matt. xii:22–32.

passions, frequent and painful tempting from demons, on the one hand, and Divine intervention on the other. But ardent prayer for help is a good thing, and essential for all – superiors and subordinates, the old and the young, teachers and learners, fathers and children. The Staretz insisted that everyone without exception, independently of his position, his circumstances or his age, should always and in all things pray God, each in so far as he knew how, for enlightenment, so that he might gradually conform his path to God's holy will, until he attains perfection.

On Obedience

Discerning the Divine will and submission to the Divine will are bound up in the closest possible way with the question of obedience, to which the Staretz attributed the utmost importance, not only for monks and Christians individually but in the life of the whole body of the Church, in her fulness (*pleroma*).

Staretz Silouan had no disciples in the usual sense of the word, occupied no pulpit; and himself had no special *staretz*. Like the majority of Athonite monks he was nurtured in the stream of common tradition – through constant attendance at the divine offices in church, listening to the reading of the Scriptures and the works of the Holy Fathers; by talking with other ascetics on the Holy Mountain, strict observance of the fasts, obedience to the Higoumen, to his spiritual father and superior at work.

He would pay quite exceptional attention to inner spiritual obedience to his Higoumen and spiritual father, considering this like a *Church Sacrament*, like a gift of grace. When he turned to his spiritual father he would pray that the Lord through His servant might have mercy on him, reveal to him His will and the way to salvation. And knowing that the first thought that comes to the soul after prayer is a sign from on high, he would seize on his confessor's first words, his first intimation, and go no further. In this lies wisdom

and the secret of true obedience, the purpose of which is to know and fulfil God's will, and not man's. Spiritual obedience of this kind, with no objections, no resistance, expressed or unexpressed, is the *sine qua non* for receiving living tradition.

Living tradition, flowing down the centuries from generation to generation, is one of the most vital and at the same time subtle aspects of the Church's life. Where he meets with no opposition the preceptor in response to faith and humility finds it easy to open up his soul, maybe fully. But the instant the spiritual father encounters resistance, however slight, the thread of pure tradition is broken and the preceptor's soul closes up.

Many people make the mistake of looking upon a spiritual guide as just an ordinary man like themselves, having like failings. (They think they must 'explain all the circumstances to him, otherwise he won't understand'. He may easily 'get it wrong' and must therefore be 'put on the right track'.) But those who contradict and correct their spiritual father place themselves above him and are no longer disciples. True, nobody is perfect, and there is no man alive who would venture to teach like Christ, 'as one having authority',^{xiii} for the teaching is 'not of man' and 'not after man'^{xiv} but the potter's clay encompasses the priceless treasure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – not only priceless but by their very nature *not to be made known*, and only he who pursues the path of true and absolute obedience can penetrate into this secret storehouse.

The prudent novice or penitent approaches his confessor in this wise – briefly he mentions the thoughts that trouble him, or explains the essentials of his condition, and then leaves the confessor free. The latter, in prayer from the very outset, awaits enlightenment from God, and then if he feels inspired pronounces his judgment, which must be the end

^{xiii}. Matt. vii:29.

^{xiv}. Gal. i:11–12.

of the matter, because if the confessor's 'first word' is let slip, the efficacy of the sacrament is sapped and confession can become an ordinary exchange of opinions.

If penitent and confessor preserve the right attitude to the sacrament, then enlightenment from God soon comes; but if for some reason there is no intimation, the confessor may ask for further details, which only then become appropriate. But if the penitent does not pay due heed to the confessor's first word and encumbers him with his own interpretations, he thereby uncovers the poverty of his faith and understanding, and yields to a secret desire to influence the confessor to his own way of thinking. This is the start of a psychological combat which St. Paul termed 'unprofitable'.^{xv.}

Faith in the power of the mystery, faith in the Lord's love for man, that He will never abandon the one who has renounced his own will and judgment for His Name's sake, for His holy Will, makes the novice unshakeable, intrepid. Having received an order, or simply some precept from his spiritual father, the novice in his desire to fulfil it braves all things, even death itself. And I believe this is because he 'is passed from death unto life'.^{xvi.}

From his very first days in the monastery Staretz Silouan was this sort of perfect novice, and so for him every spiritual father was a good preceptor. He used to say that if monks, and Christians generally, would obey their confessors and pastors unquestioningly, without criticism, and without any inner protest, then they themselves would not forfeit salvation and the whole Church would live a full life.

The Staretz' path meant that he who followed it could quickly and easily obtain the gift of God's mercy; whereas the self-willed and self-opinionated, however erudite and sharp-witted, might mortify the flesh by the harshest feats of asceticism or learned theologising, and just pick up a crumb or two falling from the Altar of Mercy. And more-

^{xv.} Heb. xiii:17.

^{xvi.} John v:24.

over they would go on living, imagining they possessed riches, whereas in fact this was not so.

The Staretz would say, 'It is one thing to believe in God, and another to know Him.'

In the vast sea which is the life of the Church the true tradition of the Spirit flows like a thin pure stream, and he who would be in this stream must renounce argument. When anything of self is introduced the waters no longer run clear, for God's supreme wisdom and truth are the opposite of human wisdom and truth. Such renunciation appears intolerable, insane even, to the self-willed, but the man who is not afraid to 'become a fool'^{xvii.} has found true life and true wisdom.

Concerning Tradition and the Scriptures

The Staretz' regard for obedience as the essential condition for learning the spiritual life is closely linked with his attitude towards Sacred Tradition and the Divine Word.

For the Staretz the life of the Church meant life in the Holy Spirit, and Sacred Tradition the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit in her. Sacred Tradition, as the eternal and immutable dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church, lies at the very root of her being, and so encompasses her life that even the very Scriptures come to be but one of its forms. Thus, were the Church to be deprived of Tradition she would cease to be what she is, for the ministry of the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit 'written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stones, but in the fleshy tables of the heart'.^{xviii.}

Suppose that for some reason the Church were to be bereft of all her books, of the Old and New Testaments, the works of the holy Fathers, of all service books – what would happen? Sacred Tradition would restore the Scriptures, not word for word, perhaps – the verbal form might be different

^{xvii.} cf. I Cor. iii:18–19.

^{xviii.} II Cor. iii:3.

– but in essence the new Scriptures would be the expression of that same ‘faith which was once delivered unto the saints’.^{xix.} They would be the expression of the one and only Holy Spirit continuously active in the Church, her foundation and her very substance.

The Scriptures are not more profound, not more important than Holy Tradition but, as said above, they are one of its forms – the most precious form, both because they are preserved and convenient to make use of. But removed from the stream of Sacred Tradition, the Scriptures cannot be rightly understood through any scientific research.

If the Apostle Paul had ‘the mind of Christ’, how much more does this apply to the whole body of the Church of which St. Paul is one member! And if the writings of St. Paul and the other Apostles are Holy Scripture, then new Scriptures of the Church, written supposedly after the loss of the old books, would in their turn become Holy Scripture, for according to the Lord’s promise God, the Holy Trinity, will be in the Church even unto the end of the world.

Men are wrong when they set aside Sacred Tradition and go, as they think, to its source – to the Holy Scriptures. The Church has her origins, not in the Scriptures but in Sacred Tradition. The Church did not possess the New Testament during the first decades of her history. She lived then by Tradition only – the Tradition St. Paul calls upon the faithful to hold.^{xx.}

It is a well-known fact that all heresiarchs have always based themselves on the Holy Scriptures, only their interpretations differing. The Apostle Peter spoke of this perversion of the meaning of the Scriptures when they are construed personally, by the individual reader.^{xxi.}

Individual members of the Church – not excluding her finest sons and teachers – do not achieve the whole fulness

^{xix.} Jude verse 3.

^{xx.} cf. II Thess. ii:15.

^{xxi.} cf. II Pet. iii:16.

of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and so their teachings and writings are marred by one or another imperfection – sometimes even error – whereas as a whole the Church's schooling, possessed of the gifts and knowledge, remains true for all time.

Unwavering faith in the Conciliar Church's teaching and profound confidence in all that the Church has recognised and confirmed in her experience lie at the root of the Athonite monk's life, preserving him from nonconformist dilettantism and fumbling research. Thus entering through faith into the life of the universal Church, the monk becomes co-possessor of her boundless riches, and his own personal experience acquires an absolutely authentic character.

By studying the Holy Scriptures, the works of the Holy Fathers and the inexhaustible dogmatic and prayerful treasures contained in liturgical books, the monk meets with ineffably great riches, and so he is not disposed himself to write on the same themes without introducing some basically new material. But when a real need arises in the life of the Church, then new books are written.

Each new book with claims to inclusion in the teaching of the Church is considered from every aspect and especially with regard to the influence it may have on the lives of men. This last criterion – its influence – is extremely important because of the close connection between dogmatic consciousness and life. The Church accepts nothing contrary to, or inconsistent with, the spirit of Christ-like love on which she feeds.

Individual sons and members of the Church on the path to this love stumble, fall, are guilty of violations, but the Church in her depths knows, through the Holy Spirit, the truth of Christ-like love, and wherever even the word *love* crops up but with another content she will not be seduced by any philosophy, any splendour of doctrine. Christ is not mocked.

And I believe that in his writings Blessed Staretz Silouan, a faithful son of the Church, has provided us with the latest

and most trustworthy criterion of truth in the Church – *Christ-like love for our enemies and Christ-like humility.*

The Staretz wrote:

‘No one can know of himself what is Divine love unless the Holy Spirit instructs him, and so we may speak of this love.’

‘The Lord is good and merciful but we could say naught of this love save what the Scriptures tell, unless the Holy Spirit so instructed us.’

‘We can deliberate only in so far as we have experienced the grace of the Holy Spirit.’

‘The Saints speak of that which they have indeed seen and know. They do not speak of what they have not seen’.^{xxii.}

‘The Saints say naught of their own devising.’

The inspired Scriptures are the ‘more sure word’^{xxiii.} ‘profitable for doctrine and for instruction in righteousness’^{xxiv.} but knowledge of God drawn from the Scriptures does not attain the sought-after perfection unless the Lord Himself instructs one through the Holy Spirit.

For all his real humility and gentleness, the Staretz would say with unshakeable conviction and inner certainty that man cannot ‘of himself’ apprehend Divine matters, which are made known ‘only through the Holy Spirit’, and so the Holy Scriptures, too, ‘written by the Holy Spirit’ cannot be understood through scientific research which can only provide surface aspects and details, never the substance.

Until man is granted from on high to ‘understand the scriptures’^{xxv.} and ‘know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven’,^{xxvi.} until through long struggle against the passions he humbles himself and experiences the resurrection of his soul and knows all that lies on this grand and mysterious

^{xxii.} cf. Col. ii:18.

^{xxiii.} II Pet. i:19.

^{xxiv.} cf. II Tim. iii:16–17.

^{xxv.} Luke xxiv:45.

^{xxvi.} Matt. xiii:11.

path, it is vital that he should cling to the tradition and teaching of the Church and not teach of himself, however erudite he may be 'as a man', because even the most brilliant conjectures on the part of a human being fall short of authentic life in the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to a certain extent lives in every man, and still more in the Christian, but we must not over-estimate this slight experience of grace and audaciously advance further.

The Holy Spirit, always positively abiding in the Church, patiently and gently seeks and awaits every soul but man himself does not allow Him freedom to operate in himself, and therefore remains outside the Light and the knowledge of the mysteries of the spiritual life.

It often happens that after experiencing a certain measure of grace man does not grow in grace but loses it. And then his religious life concentrates in his brain, as an abstract conception. In this state he frequently imagines himself possessed of spiritual knowledge, not perceiving that this sort of abstract understanding, though it may follow a certain experience of grace is a peculiar perversion of the Divine word, and the Holy Scriptures in essence remain for him 'a book . . . sealed with seven seals'.^{xxvii.}

The Holy Scriptures are the word that 'holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost'.^{xxviii.} But the words of the Saints are not completely unaffected by the intellectual level and spiritual state of those to whom they are directed. They were a lively message addressed to real people, and so scientific (historical, archaeological, philological *et al.*) interpretation of the Gospel will inevitably be unsound.

The Holy Scriptures have one definite final object but the Prophets, the Apostles and the Church's other Teachers

^{xxvii.} Rev. v:1.

^{xxviii.} II Pet. i:21.

adapted themselves to the level and understanding of the people around them.

St. Paul is an especially glowing example here. He never, of course, retreated from his unique vision of God, from his knowledge of God, yet he made himself 'all things to all men, that he might save some'.^{xxix.} In other words, Paul spoke differently to different people; and if we approach his epistles analytically only, the essential point of his 'theological system' will inevitably remain unintelligible.

The Staretz held theology and theologians in great respect but the merits of scientific theology and its positive rôle related in his mind mainly to the historical aspect of Church life and not to the real, eternal life of the Spirit.

There is a certain inevitable inconstancy and lack of precision inherent in human language, which persists even in Holy Scripture, so that the expression of Divine truth in words is only possible within set limits. The Staretz believed that the way to apprehend the Word of God lay in the fulfilment of Christ's commandments. This was the Lord's own teaching.

'And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself'.^{xxx.} The Lord summed up the whole of Holy Scripture in one short saying: 'Love God and thy neighbour'.^{xxxi.} Yet the meaning of Christ's word *love* will remain a mystery for the philologist to the end of time. The word *love* is the very name of God Himself, and its true sense is only revealed by the action of God Himself.

^{xxix.} cf. I Cor. ix:19-22.

^{xxx.} John vii:15-17.

^{xxxi.} cf. Matt. xxii:40.

On the Divine Name

The Staretz mostly spoke of God as 'the Lord'. By this title he would mean the Holy Trinity, sometimes God-the-Father or God-the-Son, and rarely the Holy Spirit, whom he invoked very often indeed, and where he could have used a pronoun, again and again he would repeat in full the designation, the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that he did this because the name, Holy Spirit, like the name, Lord and other Divine appellations, evoked a lively response in his soul, a feeling of joy and love.

This phenomenon – the joy and feeling of light and love in the heart at the invocation of God – was the cause of prolonged theological argument as to the nature of the Divine Name. Beginning on Mt. Athos in connection with the Caucasian hermit, Schema-monk Hilarion's book, *On the Mountains of the Caucasus*, the debate spread to Russia, and in the years 1912 to 1916 engrossed Russian theological thinking and the Church's hierarchy, which in the dogmatic respect led to completely happy results.

The argument about the Divine Name coincided with the period in the Staretz' spiritual life which found him waging a vigorous war against every manifestation in himself of the passions of vainglory and pride, the main causes of his heavy sufferings. Carrying constantly in his heart the most sweet Name of Christ – the Jesus Prayer never ceased its action in him – he notwithstanding distanced himself from all argument concerning the nature of this Name. He knew that through the Jesus Prayer the grace of the Holy Spirit comes into the heart; that invoking the Divine Name of Jesus hallows the whole man, consuming the passions in him, but he avoided any dogmatic interpretation of the experience they brought, fearing to err in his reasoning. Not a few such errors were made by one or the other party before rightful dogmatic understanding was arrived at.

The debate assumed an ugly, stormy character, which

saddened the Staretz, whose nights were filled with 'Adam's Lament'.

The Staretz' thoughts concerning Plants and Animals

The Blessed Staretz was a great gift from on high for me, an exceptional phenomenon. He was the perfect example of a real Christian. I saw in him an astonishingly harmonious conjunction of seemingly incompatible extremes. Thus, on the one hand, there was compassion (unusual among virile men like him) for all living creatures carried to extremes that might suggest a pathological sensibility, while at the same time another side of his life showed that it was not pathological but genuine supra-natural greatness and grace-given kindness.

The Staretz was careful even about plants – he thought that to rough-handle them went against the teaching of grace. I remember once walking with him along the path leading from the Monastery to the *kaliba* (on Mt. Athos a hermit's hut is called a *kaliba*) where I spent a year. It was a kilometre from the Monastery and the Staretz was coming to see where I lived. We carried walking-sticks, usual in mountainous regions. On each side of the path there were clumps of tall wild grass. With the idea of not letting the path get overgrown I hit out with my stick at one of the stalks, towards the top, so that a shower of seeds scattered down. The Staretz thought this rough of me and shook his head doubtfully. I understood, and felt ashamed of myself.

The Staretz used to say that the Divine Spirit teaches one to spare every living thing, and so not needlessly harm leaf or tree.

'That green leaf on the tree which you needlessly plucked – it was not wrong, only rather a pity for the little leaf. The heart that has learned to love is sorry for all created things.'

But this pity for a green leaf on a tree, or a wild flower trampled underfoot, was linked in him with the most realistic approach to everything in the world. As a Christian he

admitted that every living thing was created for man's benefit, and so when 'necessary' man might make use of them. He would scythe hay, fell trees, stock up with wood for the winter, eat fish.^{xxxii.}

Consider in his writings what the Staretz thought and felt about animals. On the one hand there is his really striking compassion for all creation, an example of which we find in his account of how he bewailed his own harshness in 'unnecessarily' killing a fly, or pouring boiling water on a bat that had settled on the balcony of his store, or how sorry he felt for every living thing, all creation, when he saw a dead snake hacked to bits – compared, on the other hand, with his detachment from every living thing in his ardent striving after God.

He looked on animals and wild beasts as 'dust' which man should not become attached to, for one must love God with all one's mind, with all one's heart, with all one's strength – that is, absolutely, forgetful of the earth.

We often see people so attached to animals that they are even 'friends' with them. This the Staretz considered to be a perversion of the order established by God and contrary to the normal state of man.^{xxxiii.} To stroke a cat, saying 'Kitty, Kitty, Kitty', or play with and talk to a dog, setting aside thoughts of God; or in one's care for animals forgetting about one's neighbour's suffering, or quarrelling with people because of animals – all this the Staretz held to be a violation of the Divine commandments which, faithfully kept, make man perfect. In the whole of the New Testament there is not a single instance of the Lord paying attention to animals, though He, of course, loved every living thing. Attaining to this perfection of human nature, in the image of the Man-Christ, is the task set before us, appropriate to our nature as

^{xxxii.} Monks living in communities, and hermits in the desert, do not, as a rule, eat meat, in accordance with the words of the Apostle, 'If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth' [cf. I Cor. viii:13].

^{xxxiii.} cf. Gen. ii:20.

created in the likeness of God, and therefore affection for and attachment to animals, so the Staretz thought, debases the human form of being. In this respect, he writes,

‘Some people attach themselves to animals but in so doing they grieve the Creator, for man is called upon to dwell eternally with the Lord, to reign with Him and love the One God. It is wrong to have a passion for animals – one must only commiserate with all living things.’

He would say that all things were created to serve man, and so, when necessary, everything could be made use of but, at the same time, man was obliged to care for all creation. Therefore, harm done unnecessarily to an animal – to plant life, even – gainsays the law of grace. But attachment to animals likewise goes against the Divine commandment, since it diminishes love for God and one’s neighbour.

Anyone who genuinely loves mankind, and in his prayers weeps for the whole world, cannot attach himself to animals.

On the Beauty of the World

The Staretz’ soul was enraptured by the beauty of the visible world. He did not show his delight in any attitude of his body, any gesture. One could only tell by the expression on his face or some intonation of his voice. This reserve made one all the more aware of his deep feelings. Ever concentrated on the inner man, he did not pay much attention to the outside world but when his eye fell upon the manifest beauty of the world, it was a fresh inducement to contemplate Divine glory and direct his heart back to God.

In this respect he was like a child – marvelling at everything. He is entirely right when he notes in his journal that whoever has lost grace fails to perceive, as one should, the beauty of the world, and loses all wonder. The inexpressible splendour of Divine creation leaves him unmoved. Conversely, where Divine grace dwells, every manifestation in the world strikes the soul by its searchless wonderfulness,

and the soul, from contemplation of visible beauty passes to a sense of God, loving and wondrous in all things.

Beholding beauty, the Staretz would look at the clouds, the sea, mountains and forests, meadows and a lone tree. He used to remark that the glory of the Creator shone with splendour even in this visible world but to behold the glory of the Lord Himself in the Holy Spirit was a vision infinitely transcending any human conception. Once, watching the movement of the clouds across the emerald Attic sky, he remarked,

‘How sublime our Lord is! What beauty He has created to His glory, for the good of His people, that men might joyously glorify their Creator . . . O Sovereign Lady, make all peoples to behold the glory of the Lord!’

Thus having briefly contemplated the visible beauty before him and the Divine glory in it, he would return anew to pray for the people.

Church Services

The Staretz was very fond of long church services, so infinitely rich in spiritual content, and he highly appreciated the contribution made by choir and reader, praying earnestly and asking God’s help for them, especially during all-night vigils. (The rule at St. Panteleimon’s provides for sixty-six all-night vigils in the course of the year.) But for all the love he felt for the majesty, the beauty and music of the services, he would still say that although they were instituted by the gift of grace from the Holy Spirit, in their form they did not constitute perfect prayer, and were accorded to the ‘company of the faithful’ as corresponding to everyone’s strength and need.

‘The Lord gave us as feeble children sung church services – we do not yet know how to pray properly but singing helps everyone when it is done in humility. But it is better still for our heart to become the temple of the Lord and our mind His altar,’ he wrote. And went on:

‘The Lord is glorified in holy churches, while hermit-monks praise God in their hearts. The anchorite’s heart is a temple, and his mind an altar, for the Lord likes to dwell in the heart and mind of man.’

And he added that when unceasing prayer settles in the depths of the heart, then the whole world is transformed into a church of God.

Man in the Likeness of Christ

The Staretz often both said and wrote that those who keep the Lord’s commandments are in the likeness of Christ. This likeness to Christ may be on a larger or smaller scale but there are no limits to it, so searchlessly lofty is man’s vocation. He does, in truth, become like unto God.

‘The Lord so loved His creature,’ the Staretz would say, ‘that man is in the likeness of God.’ He had in mind the words of St. John the Divine, ‘We shall see him as he is’.^{xxxiv.}

The Staretz was deeply attached to the saying of Christ:

‘Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory’.^{xxxv.}

To behold this glory and not participate in it is impossible, and so the words ‘that they may behold my glory’ mean ‘that they, too, may be given this glory’.

God is love and as infinite love He would give the whole of Himself to man.

‘The glory which thou gavest me I have given them.’^{xxxv.}

And if this glory is given to him, although by his nature he continues unalterably a created thing, through grace he becomes a god – that is, he receives the form of divine being. In the same way as Christ being in the form of God, in His incarnation was made in the likeness of man, so also man being in the form of a servant, in Christ puts on the form of divine being.^{xxxvi.}

^{xxxiv.} I John iii:2.

^{xxxv.} John xvii:22–24.

^{xxxvi.} cf. Phil. ii:6–7.

Of this even the Scriptures in their delicate reserve prefer to be silent.

Why? . . . Maybe because our imagination might be stirred and we might dream of heights beyond the clouds, and forget, or not recognise that Christ calls upon us to be humble.

In his recognition of the Lord as the closest, most precious, most fatherly of Fathers, the Staretz used to say that 'The Holy Spirit has made us His kin'.

By His coming into the soul the Holy Spirit makes man kin with God, so that in a mighty sweep of conviction the soul addresses the Lord as 'Father'.

The Staretz' soul was enthralled by the vision of the majesty of the Lord suffering for the sins of the people, of the whole world. He marvelled at God's immeasurable love and humbleness.

In his soul he sang praises to the Lord for His redeeming passion, and knew that it was the grace of the Holy Spirit that taught him this hymn, and the hymn was sweeter to him than aught else.

The praises of the heavenly powers he understood as unceasing glorification of the Lord for His humility and His sufferings by which He redeemed mankind from eternal death.

Mystically, in spirit, the Staretz hearkened to these Cherubic hymns which, as he put it, 'all the heavens hearken to' and which 'ring sweet because they are sung in the Holy Spirit'.

On the Quest for God

The Staretz had an idea of his own – that only someone who has known God and then lost Him can seek after Him. He would say that any search for God must be preceded by some sort of experience of God.

God exercises no compulsion on man but patiently and humbly waits for him to open his heart to Him.

God Himself seeks man before man looks for Him. And when, having caught the right moment, the Lord manifests Himself to man, only then does man come to know God in the measure given to him, and he begins to seek God Who secretes Himself from the heart. The Staretz would say,

‘Who will seek that which he has not lost? How can you look for something that you do not know at all? But the soul knows the Lord and therefore seeks Him.’

Concerning Neighbourly Relations

We see in others that which our own spiritual experience has shown us about ourselves, and so man’s attitude to his fellow is a sure sign of the degree of self-knowledge to which he has attained. Whoever has experienced how deep and intense the suffering of the human spirit can be when excluded from the light of true being, and, on the other hand, knows *what* man is when he dwells in God, has no doubt that every human being is a permanent eternal value, more precious than all the rest of the world put together. He is conscious of man’s worth, conscious that ‘the least of these my brethren’^{xxxvii.} is dear in God’s sight, and so he will never think of destroying, harming or even giving offence to his neighbour.

The man who merely ‘believes’, the man with only a limited personal experience of grace and a still vague sense of the reality of eternal life, will in the measure of his love for God keep himself from sin but his love will be far from perfect and may not prevent him from hurting his brother.

But the one who pitilessly, for his own benefit and interest, harms another, who plots or commits bloodshed, has either become like a wild beast and in his heart acknowledges that he is a brute being – which means that he does not believe in eternal life – or has set his foot on the path of demonic spirituality.

^{xxxvii.} Matt. xxv:40.

His vision of Christ gave the Staretz to experience man's godlike condition. He hailed all men as children of God, as bearers of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit as Spirit and Light of Truth to some degree inhabits and enlightens everyone. The man who dwells in grace beholds grace in others, and he who does not know it in himself does not see it in others either. He would say that one can judge the measure of grace in a man by his attitude to his neighbour. 'If a man sees the presence of the Holy Spirit in his brother, it means that he possesses a great measure of grace himself, whereas if he hates his brother – it signifies that he himself is in thrall to an evil spirit.'

The Staretz had no doubt about this. He knew specifically that everyone, whoever he might be, who hated his brother had made his heart a dwelling-place for the evil spirit, and thereby withdrawn from God.

Unity of the Spiritual World and the Greatness of the Saints

The life of the spiritual world, the Staretz recognised as one life and because of this unity every spiritual phenomenon inevitably reacts on the state of the whole spiritual world: if the phenomenon be good, the entire world of holy spirits – 'all heaven' – rejoices; if evil, then 'all heaven' sorrows. Though every spiritual phenomenon inevitably leaves its mark on the whole spiritual world, that delicate communion in the existence of all things of which the Staretz wrote is chiefly peculiar to the Saints. Such awareness as this, which exceeds the bounds of human knowledge, he ascribed to the workings of the Holy Spirit in Whom the soul 'sees' and embraces all the world in her love.

The Staretz was convinced that the Saints hear our prayers. He used to say that constant experience of communion with the Saints in prayer makes this clear. In the Holy Spirit the Saints while still here on earth partially receive this gift, and it increases when they pass away.

When he spoke of this truly Godlike virtue of the Saints, he would marvel at God's measureless love for man.

'The Lord so loved man that He gave the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit man became like unto God. Those who do not believe this, and do not pray to the Saints, have not learned how deeply the Lord loves man and how He has exalted him.'

Spiritual Vision of the World

The Staretz frequently said that 'when the whole mind is in God the world is forgotten'. He also wrote, 'The spiritual man soars like an eagle in the heights, and with his soul feels God, and beholds the whole world, though his prayer be in the darkness of the night'.

Is there not some contradiction here? Is not this vision of the world mere imagination? But again he wrote, 'Rare are the souls that know Thee – with but few is it possible to speak of Thee'.

Pure prayer draws the mind into the heart and gathers man's whole being, body included, into one. With the mind thus sunk deep in the heart all earthly images are set aside and the soul, straining towards God in inner prayer, in the light proceeding from God is aware of herself in a quite particular fashion. She sees, not external phenomena or circumstances, but herself stripped bare, her profundities unveiled.

But though this contemplation, utterly simple, takes no material form, being gathered up into a point and totally directed towards the source of life, towards God, in it are revealed the bounds between which the whole created spiritual world moves and lives, and the soul, detached from everything and seeing nothing, in God beholds the entire world and knows that she is one with this world, as she prays for it.

'I want only one thing: to pray for all men as for myself,' wrote the Staretz.

Two Ways of acquiring Knowledge of the World

The Staretz had a lively, attractive and unusually adventurous intelligence.

‘With our minds,’ he writes, ‘we cannot come to know even how the sun is made; and if we beg God to tell us how He made the sun, the answer rings in our soul, “Humble thyself, and thou shalt know, not only the sun but the Creator of the sun”. But when the soul through the Holy Spirit knows the Lord, then from joy she forgets the whole world and ceases to fret for earthly knowledge.’

These almost naïve words of his refer to different forms of knowledge of being. The usual way to acquire knowledge – the one we all know – consists in directing the cognitive faculty outwards, where it meets with phenomena, sights, forms, all in innumerable variety – a fragmentation *ad infinitum* of all that exists. This means that the knowledge thus acquired is never complete and has no real unity. Insistently seeking unity, the mind is forced to have recourse to synthesis, which cannot help being artificial. The unity thus arrived at does not really and objectively exist. It is merely a form of abstract thinking natural to the mind.

The other way to acquire knowledge of being is to direct the spirit in and toward itself and then to God. Here the process is somewhat the reverse. The mind turns away from the endless plurality and fragmentariness of world phenomena, and with all its strength addresses itself to God, and, dwelling in God, begins to see both itself and the whole world.

It was to this form of knowledge through prayer that the Staretz’ soul aspired, and though he never lost a healthy sense of the reality of this world, towards the end of his life he did, however, distance himself from worldly matters, devoid of inquisitiveness and attachments. His spirit was ever preoccupied with God and man.

Distinguishing between Grace and Illusion

Desirous to find out from the Staretz whether any sure sign existed that enabled one with certainty to distinguish between the true spiritual path and the 'token truths' of the sidewalks, I asked him about this, and here is his invaluable reply. He said,

'When the Holy Spirit fills the whole man with the sweetness of His love, the world is quite forgot, and in ineffable joy the soul contemplates God. But when the soul remembers the world again, then out of love for God and pity for man, she weeps and prays for all creation.

'Given over to weeping and prayer for the world, born of love, the soul from the sweetness of the Holy Spirit can again forget the world and again repose in God. Then, recalling the world, she again in great sorrow prays with tears, desiring salvation for all.

'And this is the true path, taught of the Holy Spirit.

'The Holy Spirit is love, peace, delight. The Holy Spirit teaches love for God and one's neighbour. But the spirit of beguilement is a proud spirit, sparing neither man nor beast, since he has created nothing himself. He operates like a thief, like a wild beast, and his path is all destruction.

'The spirit of beguilement cannot give true delight. It brings only the restless charm of vainglory – no humility, no peace, no love. Only frigid, indifferent pride.

'The Holy Spirit teaches Divine love, and the soul yearns after God and with sweet tears seeks Him day and night; whereas the enemy brings heavy, sombre melancholy that destroys the soul.

'These are the signs that distinguish the grace of God from the allurements of the enemy.'

I remarked to the Staretz that there are people who interpret freedom from passion, not as love for God but as a particular kind of contemplation of being, ranking higher than disting-

uishing good from evil, and they rank such contemplation above Christian love. To this, the Staretz replied,

‘That comes from the devil. The Holy Spirit teaches otherwise.’

And listening to the Staretz, I could not help thinking of the so-called ‘supermen’ who ascend ‘on the other side of good and evil’.

The Staretz used to say,

‘The Holy Spirit is love, and He gives the soul strength to love her enemies. And he who does not love his enemies does not know God.’

This last criterion occupied an absolutely exclusive and incontestable place in the Staretz’ soul. He would say,

‘The Lord is a merciful Creator, having compassion for all. The Lord pities all sinners as a mother is compassionate with her children even when they take the wrong path. Where there is no love for enemies and sinners, the Spirit of the Lord is missing.’

Thoughts about Freedom

I have already recounted the conversation between the Staretz and a young student, which partly reveals his views concerning freedom. Here I want to introduce some complementary thoughts that he expressed orally and partly in writing, though in language incomprehensible to most people.

The Staretz’ life was spent, above all, in prayer, and the praying mind does not think – does not reason – but lives. Its activity consists, not in the manipulation of abstract concepts but in participation in being. The truly praying mind has to do with categories different in quality from those of rational reflection. It is concerned, not with intellectual categories but with actual being, which cannot be confined within the narrow framework of abstract concepts.

The Staretz was not a philosopher in the usual sense of

the word but he was a true sage and knew things beyond the bounds of philosophy.

Let us consider, for instance, the experience known as 'remembrance of death'. This appellation in the ascetic writings of the Fathers signifies, not man's usual awareness of his mortality, not just knowing that one day we shall die – it is an especial spiritual consciousness. The first stage begins when we realise how brief is our earthly existence. Now diminishing, now increasing, at times the feeling turns into a profound sense of the corruptibility and impermanence of all earthly matters – an awareness that affects one's whole attitude to everything in the world. Whatever is not eternal loses all value, and a feeling of the futility of striving after material things takes over. The mind detaches itself from the outside world, to concentrate within, where the soul is confronted by a searchless abyss of darkness. This vision plunges the soul into an anguish which generates intense prayer, irresistible by day and by night. Time ceases to flow, not at first because the soul has glimpsed the light of eternal life but, on the contrary, because everything is consumed by a sense of eternal death. Finally, after passing through many and various stages, by the action of grace the soul is lifted into the realm of Divine light. And this is not philosophical overstepping but life, genuine life, having no need of any dialectical 'proofs'. This is indefinable, undemonstrable, secret knowledge, yet despite its being impossible to define, like authentic life it is incomparably more powerful and intrinsically convincing than impeccable abstract dialectics.

The Staretz would pray,

'Lord, people have forgotten Thee, their Creator, and they seek freedom for themselves. They do not realise that Thou art merciful and lovest the repentant sinner, and dost accord him the grace of the Holy Spirit.'

He was sparing of words in his prayer to the omniscient God and did not amplify his thoughts. 'Men seek their own freedom,' that is to say, freedom outside God, outside true life, in 'outer darkness' where there is, and can be, no free-

dom, for freedom can only exist where there is no death, where there is authentic eternal being – in God, that is.

‘Thou art merciful and dost accord them the grace of the Holy Spirit.’ God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit and then man becomes free. ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.’

Ontological or, as the Staretz called it, experienced knowledge of human liberty is extraordinarily profound in the prayer of grace. With his whole soul he recognised that there is only one real servitude – the servitude of sin – and one real freedom, which is resurrection in God.

Until man attains his resurrection in Christ everything in him is disfigured by fear of death and, consequently, by servitude to sin, also; while of those who have not yet come to know the grace of the resurrection only the ‘blessed . . . that have not seen, and yet have believed’^{xxxviii.} escape such disfiguring.

I know of no terms in which to describe the spiritual life, incomprehensible and indefinable in its sources, simple and unique in its essence. Some people might label it the domain of the superconscious but this word is unintelligible and defines nothing more than the correlation between the reflex consciousness and the world beyond its bounds.

If we move from this indefinable domain into the sphere within the competence of our inner observation and which is even to a certain extent amenable to verification, the spiritual life manifests itself in two ways – as a spiritual state or experience and as a dogmatic consciousness. These two aspects, distinct and even somehow separate in their ‘incarnation’ – in the formula in which they are clothed in our empirical life – in their essence are one and indivisible. This means that every ascetic act, every spiritual state, is indissolubly linked to a corresponding dogmatic consciousness.

With this connection in mind, I always looked for the doctrinal awareness to which the Staretz’ mighty prayer and

^{xxxviii.} John xx:29.

weeping for the world were tied. And now I would essay an expression of this awareness of his in language more comprehensible perhaps to the contemporary reader than are the Staretz' own words in their holy simplicity.

The Staretz both said and wrote that Christ-like love cannot suffer any man to perish, and in its care for the salvation of all men walks the way of Calvary.

'The Lord gives the monk the love of the Holy Spirit, and by virtue of this love the monk's heart sorrows over the people because not all men are working out their salvation. The Lord Himself so grieved over the people that He gave Himself to death on the Cross. And the Mother of God bore in her heart a like sorrow for men. And she, like her beloved Son, desired with her whole being the salvation of all. The same Holy Spirit the Lord gave to the Apostles, to our holy Fathers and to the pastors of the Church.'

In the really Christian sense the work of salvation can only be effected through love – by attracting people. There is no place for any kind of compulsion. In seeking salvation for all men love feels impelled to embrace not only the world of the living but also the world of the dead, the underworld and the world of the as yet unborn – that is, the whole race of Adam. And if love rejoices and is glad at the salvation of a brother, she also weeps and prays over a brother who perishes.

I asked the Staretz how anyone could love all men, and where it was possible to find the love that made man one with all men.

He answered:

'To be one with all, as the Lord said, "that all may be one",^{xxxix.} there is no need for us to cudgel our brains: we all have one and the same nature, and so it should be natural for us to love all men; but it is the Holy Spirit Who gives the strength to love.'

The power of love is vast and pregnant with success but

^{xxxix.} John xvii:21.

it does not override. There is a domain in human life where a limit is set even to love – where even love is not supreme. This domain is freedom.

Man's freedom is positive, real. It concedes no determination in his destiny, so that neither the sacrifice of Christ Himself nor the sacrifices of all those who have trodden in His footsteps necessarily lead to victory.

The Lord said, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth' (that is 'crucified on the cross') 'will draw all men unto me'.^{xl} Thus Christ's love hopes to draw all men to Him, and so reaches out to the last hell. There may be some – whether they be many or few, we do not know – who will meet even this perfect love, this perfect sacrifice, with rejection even on the eternal plane, and declare, 'I want no part in it'. (It was their recognition of this abyss of freedom which prompted the Fathers of the Church to repudiate the determinist theories of the Origenists. Belief in Apocatastasis, understood as universal salvation predestined in the divine purpose, would certainly rule out the sort of prayer that we see in the Staretz.)

What was made known to the Staretz in his vision of Christ for him outweighed all doubt and hesitation. He *knew* that it was the Lord Almighty Who had appeared to him. He was sure that the humility of Christ which he had come to know, and the love which filled him to the limits of his strength, were the action of God the Holy Spirit. He knew in the Holy Spirit that God is boundless love and infinite mercy, yet the knowledge of this truth did not lead him to conclude that 'anyway, we shall all be saved'. Awareness of the possibility of eternal damnation remained deeply engrained in his spirit. This was because when the soul is in a state of grace the measure of man's freedom is disclosed to her.

Absolute freedom means being able to determine one's being on all levels, independently, without constraint or limit in

^{xl} cf. John xiii:32.

any form. This is the freedom of God – man does not have it.

The temptation with freedom for the creature created in the Divine image is to fashion his own being, determine himself in all things, become a god himself, and not just take what is given, because that would entail a feeling of dependence.

The Staretz used to say that even that temptation, like any other, can be surmounted through faith in God. Faith in a good and merciful God, faith that He is beyond all perfection, attracts grace to the soul, and then there is no oppressive feeling of dependence – the soul loves God like his very own Father and lives through Him.

The Staretz was unlettered but no one could surpass him in craving for true knowledge. The path he took was, however, quite unlike that of speculative philosophers. Knowing this, I followed with the deepest interest the way in which the most heterogeneous theological problems were distilled in the alembic of his mind, to emerge in his consciousness as solutions. He could not develop a question dialectically and express it in a system of rational concepts – he was afraid of ‘erring in intellectual argument’; but the propositions he pronounced bore the imprint of exceptional profundity. One found oneself wondering whence came his wisdom?

The Staretz’ whole existence testified to the fact that knowledge of the highest spiritual truths is to be found in the keeping of the Gospel commandments, not in superficial schooling. He lived by God, and received enlightenment from God, from on high. His knowledge came not from abstract understanding but from life.

At the beginning of this chapter I set out to expound the Staretz’ teaching but in the process it has occurred to me that I might better attain my purpose by describing, so far as possible, his spiritual experience, since, on the one hand, as the action of the Great God this experience, in each of its concrete historical manifestations bears within itself some-

thing eternally-new, and, on the other, all his thoughts concerning the most profound religious problems occur as the consequence of his ascetic prayer and of visitations of divine grace.

Christianity is not a philosophy, not a doctrine, but *life*, and all the Staretz' conversations and writings are witness to this life.

Concerning Man's Personal Relationship with a Personal God

The Lord said to Pontius Pilate, 'I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth', to which Pilate replied sceptically, 'What is truth?'^{xli.} and convinced that there could be no answer to the query, did not look for one, even from Christ, but went out to the Jews.

Pilate was right. There is no answer to the question WHAT is truth? if we have in mind the ultimate truth at the root of the whole existence of the world.

But if Pilate, meaning Primal or Axiomatic Truth, had phrased his question as it should have been phrased – if he had asked WHO is truth? he would have received the answer that, a little while previously, Christ, foreseeing Pilate's query, gave at the Last Supper to his beloved disciples, and through them to the whole world: 'I am the truth'.^{xlii.}

Science and philosophy set themselves the question, WHAT is truth?, whereas Christian religious perception always considers truth as 'WHO'.

Scientists and philosophers not infrequently look upon Christians as unsound day-dreamers, whereas they themselves stand on firm ground and so label themselves positivists. In a curious way they do not realise all the negativeness of truth as WHAT. They do not understand that authentic Truth, absolute Truth, can be only 'WHO', never 'WHAT',

^{xli.} cf. John xviii:37–38.

^{xlii.} John xiv:6.

since Truth is not some abstract formula, some abstract idea, but *life itself*.

In fact, what could be more abstract, more negative than truth as WHAT? And we notice this tremendous paradox throughout the history of the human race, starting with Adam's fall. Enchanted by his reasoning mind, man lives, intoxicated as it were, so that not only 'positive' science and philosophy, like Pilate, pose the question, 'WHAT is truth?' but even in the religious life of mankind we find the same great delusion, with people continually seeking truth as 'WHAT'.

They reason that if they can arrive at the truth they seek as WHAT, they will be possessed of magic power and become unrestrained masters of being.

If man in his religious life adopts the course of rational research, his approach to the world will inevitably be pantheistic. Every time the theologising mind essays of its own strength to know the truth about God, whether or not it understands, fatally it falls into the same error in which science and philosophy and pantheism are sunk – intuiting truth as 'WHAT'.

Truth as 'WHO' is never arrived at through reason. God as 'WHO' can be known only through communion in being – that is, only by the Holy Spirit. Staretz Silouan constantly emphasised this.

The Lord Himself spoke of it thus:

'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him . . . The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.'^{xliii}

Orthodox ascetic experience rejects the course of abstract contemplation. Whoever restricts his thinking about God to abstract contemplation of Good, Beauty, Eternity, Love and so on, is on the wrong road. The one who only strips himself

^{xliii}. John xiv:23,26.

of all empirical forms and conceptions has also not found the true path.

Orthodox contemplation of God is not abstract contemplation of Good, Love and the like. Nor is it a simple withdrawal of the mind from all empirical forms and conceptions. True contemplation is given by God through His coming into the soul. The soul then contemplates God and beholds that He loves, that He is good, magnificent, eternal; sees Him celestial, ineffable. But in the abstract nothing can be contemplated.

Imagination plays no part in true spiritual life, which is wholly concrete and positive. Genuine concourse with God is to be sought solely through personal prayer to the Personal God. Real spiritual Christian experience is communion with God absolutely free, and so does not depend only on man's efforts and will, as is possible in non-Christian (pantheistic) experience.

With my clumsy words I shall never manage to convey to the reader what struck me in my contact with the Staretz. Lively discussion with him bore an especial stamp. Simple and modest as was his conversation, what he said was extremely effective, proceeding as it did from profound experience of being – the words of a genuine bearer of the life of the Spirit.

Christ's manifestation to Silouan was a *personal* encounter by virtue of which his approach to God acquired a deeply personal character. In prayer he conversed with God *face to Face*. The feeling of God being Personal delivers prayer from the imagination and abstract argument, transporting everything into an invisible core of lively inward communion. Concentrated within, prayer ceases to be a 'cry into space', and the mind becomes all attention and listening. Calling upon the Divine Name – Father, Lord and other appellations – Silouan continued caught up in a state about which 'it is

not lawful for a man to speak'.^{xliv.} But whoever has himself experienced the presence of the living God will understand.

A remarkable ascetic in St. Panteleimon's noticed this in Staretz Silouan and was awed and at a loss but only spoke of it after the Staretz' demise.

Love for Enemies

Just as every rationalistic system has its logical sequence, its dialectics, so the spiritual world has – if we are to apply the conventional terms – its structure, its dialectics. But the argument of spiritual experience is peculiar to itself and does not follow the ordinary process of reasoning. Rationalists may, therefore, find it strange that Blessed Staretz Silouan should regard the presence of love for enemies as the criterion of true faith, of true communion with God, and a sign of the real action of grace.

Here, despite my desire to be as brief as possible, avoiding all that may be superfluous, I feel I must add a few words of explanation.

To man has been given the hope of receiving in the world to come the great gift of divine likeness and full beatitude. The best he can have in this world, however, is a pledge of this future state. Within the confines of his earthly existence it is given to him, clothed with flesh, to be able during prayer to dwell in God while remembering the world. But when he arrives at a more complete abiding in God 'the world is quite forgot', just as a man who 'cleaves to the earth' with his whole self forgets God.

But how is it possible to speak of love for enemies as the criterion of true communion with the Divine, if in his more complete abiding in God a man forgets the world? If he forgets the world, he thinks of neither friend nor foe.

God Who in His substance is supra-terrestrial, transcendent, is none the less immanent in the world by reason of

^{xliv.} cf. II Cor. xii:4.

His action upon it. And this immanence of activity in no way violates the fulness and perfection of God's transcendence. But man here on earth, clothed with flesh, possesses no such perfection, and so when he abides wholly- with all his mind and heart – in God, he is no longer aware of the world. This must not, however, lead us to conclude that fulness of life in God is unconnected with love for enemies. The Staretz always asserted that the two were most closely bound together.

In his vision of the Lord he was given a degree of knowledge that leaves no room for doubt and hesitation. He emphatically declared that the man who loves God through the Holy Spirit must of necessity love the whole of God's creation, too, mankind first and foremost. This love he saw as the gift of the Holy Spirit – he looked upon it as action from on High. And inversely, he also experienced that complete absorption in God which springs from a blessed love for one's fellow men.

When he spoke of 'enemies' the Staretz was merely using current language – a great deal was being said and written about enemies of the faith. Himself, he divided people, not into enemies or friends but according to whether they knew or did not know Him. In other historical circumstances one can suppose that the Staretz would have expressed himself differently, as was often the case when he spoke of love for one's fellow-man in general – that is, for all people, good or bad. In this he saw likeness to Christ, Whose arms were stretched on the cross to draw *all* men unto Him.^{xlv.}

Wherein lies the force of Christ's commandment, 'Love your enemies'? Why did the Lord say that those who keep His commandments would know *whence* came the doctrine?^{xlvi.} How did the Staretz interpret this?

God is love, absolute love embracing every living thing in abundance. God is present in hell, too, as love. By allow-

^{xlv.} cf. John xii:32.

^{xlvi.} cf. John vii:17.

ing man actually to know this love, in so far as he is able, the Holy Spirit reveals to him the path to fulness of being.

To say 'enemy' implies rejection. By such rejection a man falls from the plenitude of God and is no longer in God. Those who have attained the Kingdom of Heaven and abide in God, in the Holy Spirit behold every abyss of hell for there is no domain in all that exists where God could not be. 'The whole paradise of Saints lives by the Holy Spirit, and from the Holy Spirit nothing in creation is hid,' writes the Staretz. 'God is love and in the Saints the Holy Spirit is love.' Dwelling in heaven, the Saints behold hell and embrace it, too, in their love.

Those who dislike and reject their fellow-man are impoverished in their being. They do not know the true God, Who is all-embracing love. They have not found the way to Him.

Because a man cannot simultaneously dwell wholly in God and wholly in the world, it is possible to judge whether a given state of contemplation was a reality or an illusion only after the soul has returned to consciousness of the world; for then, as the Staretz pointed out, if there were no love for enemies, and so for all creatures, it would be a true indication that the supposed contemplation had not been communion with the true God.

A man can be caught up into contemplation^{xlvi} before he is aware of it, and he can fail to understand what has befallen him, even if it come not from God. And if the fruit of his contemplation after his 'return' is a proud indifference to the fate of the world, the destinies of man, it was certainly fallacious. Thus, the truth or fraudulence of contemplation is known by its fruits.

Both Christ's commandments – of love towards God and love towards our neighbour – make up a single life. Therefore, if a man believes that he lives in and loves God, and then hates his brother, he is deluded. In this manner the

^{xlvi} cf. II Cor. xii:4.

second commandment affords us the means whereby to check how truly we are living in the true God.

Distinguishing Good from Evil

Just as he believed the second commandment – of love towards one's neighbour – to be a sure guiding principle in checking the soundness of our path towards God, so the Staretz held that in distinguishing good from evil, it was not so much the purpose that counted – however holy and lofty it may appear – as the means chosen to achieve that purpose.

God alone is absolute. Evil, which has no original essence but is merely the resistance of the free creature to Him that is before all ages – to God – cannot be absolute. Therefore evil in the literal sense does not, and cannot, exist. All evil effected by free beings must live like a parasite on the body of the good. Evil is bound to find a *justification* for itself, must appear disguised as good – often the highest good. Evil always and inevitably contains an element appearing to have a positive value, and it is this which seduces man. Evil strives to present its positive aspect as a jewel so precious that *all means are justified* to attain it.

Absolute good cannot be achieved in man's empirical existence – there is an element of imperfection in all human undertakings. This presence of imperfection in human good on the one hand, and the inevitable presence of some pretence of good in evil on the other, often make it extremely difficult to distinguish good from evil.

The Staretz believed that evil always proceeds by means of deceit, camouflaging itself as good, whereas good in order to realise itself does not need the co-operation of evil. Therefore, so soon as wrong means – malice, lying, violence and their like – make their appearance, one is entering a domain alien to the spirit of Christ. Good is not attained by evil means and the end does not justify the means. *Good not obtained by good means is not good*. This is the testament we have received from the Apostles and holy Fathers. Although

good frequently triumphs and by its appearance rectifies evil, this does not mean that evil has led to good, that good has come out of evil. This is impossible. But the power of God is such that where it appears, it heals all things so wholly that no scar remains – the damage caused by evil is effaced – for God is the fulness of life and creates life from nothing.

The Way of the Church

‘It is given to our Orthodox Church through the Holy Spirit to fathom the mysteries of God, and she is strong in the holiness of her thought and her patience.’

The mystery of God which the Church understands in the Holy Spirit is the love of Christ.

The holy thought of the Church is that all men should be saved. And the path she treads towards this holy end is the path of patience – that is, of sacrifice.

In preaching the love of Christ to the world, the Church calls all men to the fulness of Divine life but people do not understand her call, and repudiate it. When she bids men keep Christ’s commandment and love their enemies, the Church finds herself caught between conflicting forces who naturally vent their anger upon her when she crosses their course. But the Church, actualising Christ’s mission on earth – the salvation of the whole world – purposely takes upon herself the world’s anger, just as Christ took upon Himself the sins of the world. And as Christ was persecuted in this world of sin, and had to suffer, so the true Church of Christ must also be persecuted and suffer. The Lord Himself and the Apostles spoke of this spiritual law of life in Christ, and St. Paul put it in plain words when he wrote, ‘Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution’. ^{xlviii.}

And this is always and everywhere so in the whole world, where only sin exists.

^{xlviii.} II Tim. iii: 12.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.’^{xlix.} What the Lord says here is that those who preach the peace of God shall be like Him, the only-begotten Son of God – like Him in all things, not only in His glory and His resurrection but also in His humiliation and death. The Scriptures often make mention of this and so those who truly preach Christ’s peace should never lose sight of Golgotha either.

And all this only because of the bidding – Love your enemies. ‘Ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you,’ says Christ to the Jews.¹ And the Church’s preaching, which is the same – ‘Love your enemies’ – is not accepted by the world, and so all down the centuries the world has persecuted the true Church, slain and will continue to slay her servants.

Throughout my time with Blessed Staretz Silouan I never for an instant doubted that his words were the ‘words of life eternal’ received from on high, and that it was not some sophistry that had taught him the truth which his whole life bore witness to. A great many people talk lightly about love of Christ but their actions are a scandal to the world and so what they say has no life-giving force.

The Staretz, with whom I was on close terms for many years, and of whom in my foolishness I now make bold to write, was such a great, such a splendid ascetic, that I cannot find words to express my awe. At the same time his life was so simple, so natural and truly humble that any rhetoric on my part would introduce an alien element. This is why it is so difficult to write about him.

There are people for whom a brief word is not enough, while others are put off by lengthy exegesis. The Staretz’ sacred, plain teaching, because it is so simple, is beyond the understanding of many, and so I have decided to add my

^{xlix.} Matt. v: 9.

¹ John viii: 37.

own arid, distorted comment, presuming no doubt erroneously, that in doing so I may help someone to understand who is used to a different style of life, of expression.

Let us consider, for example, this brief homily of the Staretz.

‘What is necessary to have peace in soul and body? We must love all men as ourself, and be ready for death at all times.’

At the thought of approaching death the soul is generally seized with uneasy dread, often with despair, too, to such an extent that the body falls ill because of the soul’s torment. So how is it that the Staretz can say that constant preparedness for death and love for all men fills not only the soul but the body, too, with peace? A curious, incomprehensible doctrine!

When he speaks of peace in soul and body the Staretz is envisaging circumstances when not the soul only but the body, too, knows the blessed action of grace. However, here he is thinking of a measure of grace less than that which he knew when the Lord appeared to him. In the latter instance grace both in soul and body was so powerful that his body, also, was aware of being hallowed, and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit evoked such potent love for Christ that it, too, wanted to suffer for the Lord.

On the Difference between Christian Love and the Justice of Men

People usually interpret justice in the juridical sense. We reject the idea of laying one man’s guilt on another – it is ‘not fair’. It does not accord with our idea about equity. But the spirit of Christian love speaks otherwise, seeing nothing strange but rather something natural in sharing the guilt of those we love – even in assuming full responsibility for their wrong-doing. Indeed, it is only in this bearing of another’s guilt that the authenticity of love is made manifest and develops into full awareness of self. What sense is there in enjoying only the pleasurable side of love? Indeed, it is only

in willingly taking upon oneself the loved one's guilt and burdens that love attains its multifold perfection.

Many of us cannot, or do not want to, accept and suffer of our own free will the consequences of Adam's original sin. 'Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit but what has that to do with me?' we protest. 'I am ready to answer for my own sins but certainly not for the sins of others.' And we do not realise that in reacting thus we are repeating in ourselves the sin of our forefather Adam, making it our own personal sin, leading to our own personal fall. Adam denied responsibility, laying all the blame on Eve and on God Who had given him this wife; and by so doing he destroyed the unity of Man and his communion with God. So, each time we refuse to take on ourselves the blame for our common evil, for the actions of our neighbour, we are repeating the same sin and likewise shattering the unity of Man. The Lord questioned Adam before Eve, and we must suppose that if Adam, instead of justifying himself, had taken upon his shoulders the responsibility for their joint sin, the destinies of the world might have been different, just as they will alter now if we in our day assume the burden of the transgressions of our fellow man.

We can all find ways of vindicating ourselves on all occasions but if we really examine our hearts we shall see that in justifying ourselves we are not guileless. Man justifies himself, firstly, because he does not want to acknowledge that he is even partially to blame for the evil in the world, and, secondly, because he does not realise that he is endowed with godlike freedom. He sees himself as merely part of the world's phenomena, a thing of this world, and, as such, dependent on the world. There is a considerable element of bondage in this, and self-justification, therefore, is a slavish business unworthy of a son of God. I saw no tendency towards self-justification in the Staretz. But it is strange how to many people this taking the blame for the wrong-doing of others, and asking for forgiveness, savours of subjection – so vast the distinction in outlook between the sons of the

Spirit of Christ and non-spiritual people. The latter cannot believe it possible to feel all humanity as a single whole to be incorporated in the personal existence of every man, without exception. According to the second commandment, *Love thy neighbour as thyself*, each of us must, and can, comprise all mankind in our own personal being. Then all the evil that occurs in the world will be seen, not as something extraneous but as our own.

If each human person-hypostasis, created in the image of the absolute Divine Hypostases, is capable of containing in himself the fulness of all human being, in the same way as each of the Three Persons of the Godhead is the bearer of all the fulness of Divine being (the profound purport of the second commandment) then shall we all contend against evil, cosmic evil, each beginning with himself.

The Staretz himself always spoke only of God's love, never of His justice, but I purposely got him to talk about this, and here approximately is what he said:

'One cannot say that God is unjust – that there is injustice in Him – but neither can one say that He is just in our sense of the word. St. Isaac of Syria wrote, *Do not presume to call God just, for what sort of justice is this – we sinned, yet He gave up His only-begotten Son on the cross?* To which we could add, *We sinned, yet God appointed His holy angels to minister unto our salvation. But the angels, filled with love as they are, themselves desire to wait upon us and thereby accept affliction in our service. And the Lord surrendered the animals and the rest of the created world to the law of corruption because it was not proper for them to remain immune when man, for whose sake they were created, through his own sin became a slave to corruption. So, willing or unwilling, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"*^{li} in compassion for man. And this is not the law of justice – it is the law of love.'

^{li} cf. Rom. viii: 20–22.

Christ-like love, as Divine strength, as the gift of the One Holy Spirit, working all in all, makes all men ontologically one. Love takes to itself the life of the loved one. He who loves God is drawn into the life of the Godhead. He who loves his brother encloses in his own hypostatic being the life of his brother. The one who loves the whole world, in spirit will embrace the whole world.

Intense prayer for the world, like Staretz Silouan's, leads to just such an awareness of the ontological community between one's personal existence and the existence of all mankind. If it is possible to say, as do many contemporary philosophers, that our sense-perception of a given object is not a mere subjective, psychical act distinct from the objective existence of the object perceived but that it is the object itself by its positive action entering our consciousness, thus establishing a sharing of being – how much more community in being must there be where the one all-penetrating Divine grace of the Holy Spirit, Creator of all things, operates!

The Staretz' Unceasing Prayer

The Lord at the end of His life said, 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me'.^{lii}

Whoever has tried really to keep Christ's commandments during his life can to a certain extent conceive of the immeasurable grandeur of Christ's words – immeasurable for everyone throughout the whole history of the world.

When Christ lived on earth people who heard Him were likewise at a loss to understand, as we are now. What Christ preached was 'not after man'.^{liii} They all saw this, and unable to accept God manifested in so lowly a form, they cried, 'He hath a devil . . . Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil'. 'Many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?' But others replied, 'Of

^{lii}. John xiv: 30.

^{liii}. Gal. i: 11.

a truth this is the Prophet' and 'There was a division among the people because of him'.^{liv.}

Staretz Silouan was a human being and so the clause in one of the Church's liturgical prayers, 'There is no man who shall live and sin not,' must apply to him. Still, in his conversation and writings we meet with thoughts that surpass any ordinary man, reaching into territories beyond the understanding of 'normal' people. Yet at the same time there is not, and cannot be, any doubt that he was speaking the bare truth about himself. For almost half a century he lived in the Monastery under the eyes of many hundreds of people, some of whom are alive to this day. He led a communal life which shows up the slightest hint of mental unbalance. Many of them disliked him. Some inveighed against him face to face, saying that he was 'bewitched'. Others would say, 'Ugh! Damned saint!' And he *never once* answered back. Of course, this was through the gift of grace, to preserve which he spent his whole life in extraordinary ascetic striving.

To avoid excess I shall not include here all that the Blessed Staretz said that goes beyond the bounds of ordinary human understanding and which the attentive reader will find for himself in the *Writings* – where, for instance, speaking from long years of experience, the Staretz says that the saints never cease praying. Or the following:

'At first, because of my lack of experience, I let a dissolute thought enter my heart. I went to my spiritual father and said, "I have had a lecherous thought." He replied, "You must never dwell on such thoughts." Forty-five years have gone by since then and I have never once accepted such thoughts, never once been angry with anyone, for my soul is always aware of the Lord's love and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, and I do not dwell on affronts.'

Here is what happened once. A remarkable ascetic was living in the Monastery, Schema-monk Spiridon. He had been

^{liv.} cf. John x: 21, 20. John vii: 40, 43.

there half a century. Physically, he was a heavily-built man, strong in body and soul, and very hard-working. He was a real monk, a real ascetic. From the outset of his monastic life he loved the Jesus Prayer and kept it going steadily, a practice demanding exceptional patience, concentration and self-control. Like most of the monks on the Holy Mountain Father Spiridon was a very simple, almost unlettered man but he was a wise man – long experience of ‘mental activity’ had afforded him a clear conception of man’s powers, of the properties of the soul. He realised that mental prayer demands that the mind be free of impressions, and with firm, profound faith he carried on with ascetic feats inconceivable to most people.

Father Spiridon’s spiritual ‘obedience’ was a strenuous one. He was steward of the Monastery property (*Krumitz*) in the north-west of the Athonite Peninsula, consisting of olive groves and vineyards. The last three or four years of his life he spent in the Monastery infirmary, suffering from rheumatism which crippled the joints of his arms and legs, and prevented him from working.

One winter when Staretz Silouan was taken ill with influenza and lay temporarily in the infirmary, he was put in a cubicle next to Father Spiridon. A sick hierodeacon lay in the next room.

One afternoon Father Spiridon was sitting in his cubicle, his face turned towards Father Silouan, who was lying clothed – that is, wearing his under-cassock and girdle – as the ascetics on Mt. Athos generally are in token of their readiness, day and night, to rise to their feet in prayer. Father Spiridon was talking about prayer, while Staretz Silouan listened in silence.

‘So it is, one prays and prays, but when the time comes and you have to pay attention to your work, prayer gets interrupted. I would have to go and prune the olive-trees and while looking round at the branches and wondering how best to thin them out – that was the end of prayer,’ said Father Spiridon.

At these words Staretz Silouan got down from his bunk, put on his boots, put on his thick jacket – it was cold – and said quietly, ‘It is not like that with us,’ left the ward and went back to his cell.

The astonished Father Spiridon sat for a while, at a loss, and then went to the bed of a sick hierodeacon in the next ward, told him about the exchange with Father Silouan and said,

‘Father Deacon, you know Father Silouan well – tell me, what did he mean, “It is not like that with us”?’

The deacon was silent. Father Spiridon continued,

‘Either he has got it wrong or else he is really great.’

Knowing Father Spiridon for an aged and experienced ascetic, the hierodeacon said to him,

‘Father Spiridon, you know better than I what he meant.’

Father Spiridon sat on thoughtfully for a while, and then left, saying,

‘Yes, it’s an amazing thing.’

On Spiritual Guidance

Many years of intercourse with the Staretz convinced me that he was familiar with the mysteries of the spirit, which made him, indeed, a ‘faithful guide’. After the exceptional – infrequent in the history of the Church – visitations of grace which he was deemed worthy of consequent on almost fifty years of ascetic effort; after certain mistakes made during the first half of his long ascetic life, the Staretz approached the measure of knowledge, the measure of perfection, that made him an undoubted mainstay for others.

He knew the hierarchy of spiritual states – the sequence of spiritual growth, which is so important, essential even, for a progress without stumbling. It is not at all unusual to come across, in the spiritual life of monks and laymen alike, infringement or perversion of this hierarchy, in which a certain spiritual state or ascetic practice satisfies a man, who then refuses the next step on his path, considering the new

state inferior to the first one, and thereby setting a limit to further progress.

The Staretz knew the spiritual trail by experience. He would point out the three main stages along the route. The first – the acquisition of grace. The second, when grace is lost. And the third when grace returns or is acquired anew through the ascetic toil of humility. Many people have received grace, and not only those in the Church but outside the Church, too, for God is no respecter of persons. No one, however, has preserved their initial grace, and only a very few have acquired it again. Whoever has not experienced this second period, whoever has not gone through the ascetic struggle for the return of grace, is virtually lacking in authentic spiritual knowledge.

Staretz Silouan was rich not only in personal, inner experience – he was theoretically well-versed in the ascetic writings of the Fathers of the Church, and remained not only faithful to Church tradition but by God's grace the experience of the great Fathers was repeated in him.

He read very little – he did not care for reading because the process of reading hindered his praying. But he liked to listen because he could pay attention to what was being read without breaking off the Jesus Prayer. He would listen to the readings in church during the night offices. He read a little alone in his cell, learned much in lively discussions with other ascetics on the Holy Mountain, among whom were not a few who were richly endowed. In the 'thirties he would often go to see his friend Schema-monk Cassian when the latter was living near the Monastery, at 'The Cypresses'. Father Cassian was very fond of the Staretz, respected him, set store by his visits and was pleased to read aloud to him. The Staretz knew by heart many passages from the works of the holy Fathers. This was facilitated by the similar, if not identical nature of their common experiences. Memorizing spiritual matters is very difficult – there are too few expressions, too little imagery for the material memory to lean on. Is this not why the all-knowing Lord used lively

parallels in everyday life, and parables, when teaching of the mysteries of the Kingdom? 'Book-learning' can afford some substitute for spiritual knowledge, as is apparent in people with a great deal of intellectual experience, but, of course, only one who has himself endured all things can really remember the teachings of the Fathers – one who himself has been accorded from on high expert knowledge of the mysteries of the spiritual world.

This 'simple' man, Staretz Silouan, because of his long combat emerged the possessor of knowledge concerning the methods and means of ascetic labour. This knowledge, combined with his spiritual strength, made him on the one hand innerly free of formalities, and on the other, preserved him from wandering along alien paths, perplexed and uncomprehending.

Many alien paths lie parallel with the one true path. Many closed spheres foreign to Christianity present themselves to the spiritual eye of the ascetic, and he is unable to make them out, if the Divine light is not with him. The Staretz who in the Holy Spirit was deemed worthy of beholding Christ, who by the Holy Spirit was lifted up to a vision of the Uncreated Light, bore this light in himself and so was able, with startling acuteness, to distinguish between the real truth and the masks and tokens that man inevitably meets with on his spiritual paths.

On Clairvoyance and its Different Forms

Knowledge of the passions acquired by overcoming them leads to discernment through experience. But it must be noted that clairvoyance resulting from experience of long struggle against the passions does not attain to the perfection of the gift of clairvoyance through the special action of grace. The first form perceives a man's spiritual state – by certain gestures, facial expressions, by the way he speaks or keeps silent, the topics chosen, the psychological atmosphere engendered. But the most reliable criterion to judge of some-

body is to hold a conversation with him because what he says distinguishes between the measure of his actual spiritual experience and what is merely the result of superficial learning. Yet the second kind of clairvoyance born of grace knows all things through prayer and has no need of man's presence.

As well as what has just been said, in his prolonged inner struggle the ascetic encounters three aspects of clairvoyance. The first is clairvoyance natural to certain people refined by a life of asceticism. The second is the work of demons. And the third is the gift of grace.

The first, the devout and humble man may find useful and good, since it connects with a more sensitive keeping of Christ's commandments concerning one's neighbour. It will be harmful to the proud and passionate individual as it affords opportunities for the passions and opens up further possibilities for their satisfaction.

The second, the work of demons, is extraordinarily dangerous for anyone susceptible to it, since sooner or later it will lead to painful violation of man's whole psychological and spiritual strength, distorting his very personality.

The third, the gift of grace, entails the utmost responsibility and is the source of great spiritual suffering. It is in no wise accorded to the proud man.

All three of these types of clairvoyance cause suffering. With the first – natural intuition – suffering follows as the consequence of increased sensibility of the nervous system. With the second, it is the destructive, on the whole ruinous nature of demonic action that not seldom becomes apparent only in the long run. Though this intuition may sometimes enable one to read someone else's mind, his inner self still remains inaccessible. Clairvoyance may be more reliable where outside events are concerned. It affords occasions for self-conceit to those who adopt it.

Real spiritual clairvoyance is the gift of grace. It sees into the depths of a man's soul, so often hidden from the man

himself. It has no psycho-pathological element and causes suffering to the bearer only because, as the gift of God, it is full of love and sees mainly ugliness and infamy in man. This is the pain of love. People having this gift never try to hold on to it – presumption and conceitedness are foreign to them.

To return to the type of clairvoyance born of experience: the holy Fathers termed this the gift of insight, and considered it the loftiest ascetic achievement. The essence of it consists, on the one hand, in its ability to recognise the causes of this or that spiritual phenomenon – that is, whether it proceeds from grace or is it the work of demonic influences, or does it occur in the natural order of human development? On the other hand, the purpose of this gift of discernment is that we should know the stages of spiritual life, the sequence of spiritual states and their relative value and merit.

Ascetics rate this gift very highly indeed because it is uniquely the product of long struggle against the passions, of consolation and visitations of grace, of much temptation and many hostile attacks. It is prized in preceptors because the enemy likes to disguise himself as an angel of light, and few there be who can detect him plainly.

There are known instances when Blessed Staretz Silouan in prayer beheld something remote as though it were happening close by; when he saw into someone's future, or when profound secrets of the human soul were revealed to him. There are many people still alive who can bear witness to this in their own case but he himself never aspired to it and never accorded much significance to it. His soul was totally engulfed in compassion for the world. He concentrated himself utterly on prayer for the world, and in his spiritual life prized this love above all else.

VI

Pure Prayer and Mental Stillness

The whole of Blessed Staretz Silouan's life was prayer. He prayed unceasingly, in the course of the day changing the mode of his prayer to accord with the circumstances of the daily round. He possessed, too, the greatest gift of mental prayer, to which he devoted chiefly the night hours, in the complete silence and darkness propitious to this form of prayer.

The question of forms or aspects of prayer is one of the most important there is in asceticism generally. It was for the Staretz, too, so let us pause and consider it.

Concerning the Three Forms of Prayer

Prayer is creation, the loftiest form of creation, creation *par excellence*, which makes prayer infinitely diverse. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish different modes depending on the situation or orientation of the main spiritual powers of the one who prays. This is what the Fathers of the Church do.

In this respect prayer corresponds with the stages in the normal development of the human spirit. The first impulse of the mind is outward-bound. The second, a return into itself. And the third – ascent towards God through the inner man.

To accord with this progression the Holy Fathers instituted three forms of prayer. The first, because the mind is as yet incapable of attaining directly to pure vision of God, is marked by the imagination. The second, by meditation, and the third by rapt concentration. This last, the Fathers

consider to be the only sound, proper and fruitful mode of prayer but taking into account the impossibility of such prayer for man at the outset of his pilgrimage towards God, they accept the first two forms also as normal and duly profitable. However, they do point out that if one is content with the first form of prayer, and cultivates it in his spiritual life, not only unfruitfulness but deep-rooted spiritual ill-health may result. Concerning the second mode of prayer, though in many ways superior to the first, it still bears little fruit and does not rescue one from the constant battle against wrong thoughts, does not free one from the passions or, even less, lead to pure contemplation. The third, the most perfect form of prayer is when with his mind stationed in his heart, a man prays from the very depths of his being, without images, with a pure mind standing before God.

The first form of prayer imprisons man in constant error, in an imaginary world, in a world of dreams and, if you like, of poetic creation. The divine, and in general all that is spiritual presents itself in various fantastical aspects, following which actual human life, too, is gradually diffused by elements from the sphere of fantasy.

With the second form of prayer – when heart and mind are wide open to all that is extraneous – one is left continually vulnerable to the most heterogeneous influences from without, unable to discern what exactly is happening objectively. How do all these alien thoughts and conflicts arise in man, impotent, as he ought not to be, against the onslaught of the passions? Grace sometimes comes with this sort of prayer, putting him in a good frame of mind, but because his inner disposition is not right he is unable to continue in this grace. Having accumulated a measure of religious knowledge and achieved relatively decorous behaviour, content with matters, he gradually takes to speculative theology, and in step with his success in this, so does his inner battle against the subtle passions – vanity and pride – in his soul decrease, and loss of grace is intensified. As it develops, this form of

prayer, which is characterised by the concentration of attention in the brain, leads to rational, philosophical intuition, which, like the first form of prayer, opens the way to a contrived world of the imagination. True, this form of abstract conceptual imagination is less naïve, less gross, and less far from the truth than the first.

The third form of prayer – *when the mind is conjoined with the heart* – is, generally speaking, the *normal religious state* for the human spirit, desired, sought after, bestowed from on high. Every believer experiences this union of mind and heart when he prays attentively, ‘from the bottom of his heart’. He knows it to a still greater degree when his heart is softened and he feels a sweet sense of Divine love. Tears of compunction during prayer are a sure sign that the mind is united with the heart, and that pure prayer has found its prime place – the initial step in ascent to God. This is why ascetics rate tears so highly. But now, in our given case, in discussing the third form of prayer, I am referring to something different and more important – *the mind in prayerful attention stationed in the heart*.

As a typical consequence, the virtue of this movement and installation of the mind within, the imagination is curtailed and the mind released from all the mental images that have invaded it. In this state the mind becomes all ears and eyes, and sees and hears every extrinsic thought approaching *from without*, before it can invade the heart. Praying the while, the mind not only refuses to admit extraneous thoughts into the heart but positively thrusts them aside and preserves itself from association with them, thereby at the very outset cutting short the action of every passion in its initial stage. (This is an extraordinarily profound and complex question, and I can only give a very primitive outline of it here.)

On the Development of Intrusive Thoughts

Sin becomes sin after completing specified stages in its inner development.

The first stage is when some spiritual influence approaches from without, which may, to begin with, be quite vague and shapeless. The initial stage in formation is the appearance in the field of man's inner vision of an image – and as this does not depend on one's will, it is not regarded as a sin. Images in some cases appear to take on visible form, while others are mostly products of the mind, but more often it is a combination of the two. As visible images also generate some thought or other, ascetics label all images 'intrusive thoughts'.

The man who is not in thrall to the passions can recognise the force of an intrusive thought and yet remain completely free from its power. But if there is some 'place' in one – some suitable soil for the development of the intrusive thought – the thought will strive to take possession of one's psychic being – of the heart, the soul. It achieves this because it prompts a feeling of the delight to be afforded by one or another passion. The delight figures 'temptation'. But even the fleeting pleasure, though it testifies to man's imperfection, is not yet to be reckoned as sin. It is only a 'proposal' for sin.

The further development of a sinful intrusive thought can be portrayed roughly as follows: the mind is attracted by the delectation to be afforded by the passion, and this is an extremely important and crucial moment because the fusion of mind with tempting ideas provides fertile soil for passion. If the mind does not by an exercise of the will tear itself away from the suggested delights but continues to dwell on them, it will find itself pleasantly attracted, then involved and finally positively acquiescent. After that, the ever-increasing delight in the passion may take possession of – make captive – mind and will. Lastly, the whole strength of the one enslaved by passion is directed to a more or less determined actualization of sin, if there are no outside impediments – or, where there are, to seeking ways of getting round them.

Such captivity may happen once only and never recur if it had come about because of the inexperience of someone

engaged in the ascetic struggle. But if the enchantment repeats itself, passion becomes second nature, and then all man's natural forces are at its service.

The initial appearance of the delights offered by passion should start off a struggle which can continue through every stage in the development of a sinful thought. And at each of these stages the wrong thought can be mastered and so not transformed into deed. Nevertheless, the instant the will wavers, an element of sin enters, which must be repented of lest we forfeit grace.

The spiritually inexperienced man generally encounters sinful thoughts only after they have progressed, unnoticed, through the first stages of development – that is, after they have acquired a measure of strength – when the danger approaches of actually sinning.

In order not to let this happen, it is essential to stay the mind in prayer in the heart. This is an urgent necessity for every ascetic striver desirous, through true repentance, of consolidating himself in the spiritual life, because, as pointed out above, where the heart is so stablished sin is cut off at the very moment of conception. Here, perhaps it would be timely to cite the words of the Prophet, 'O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed: happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones'.ⁱ (The stones – the name of Jesus Christ.)

Shutting the doors of his heart, stationing his mind on guard like a sentinel, unfettered by imagination and cogitation but armed with prayer and the Name of Jesus Christ, the ascetic striver embarks on the struggle against all external influence, all thoughts from without. This is the essence of mental vigilance. Its purpose is to contend against the passions. In a wider and all-comprehensive sense victory over the passions is achieved by keeping Christ's commandments but now we are discussing an especial form of ascetic awareness which begins after the ascetic, having gone through the

ⁱ Ps. cxxxvii: 8–9.

familiar stages of spiritual development, abandons the prayer of the imagination in its first form, and then in its second, having found by experience its imperfection also.

Preserving the mind and heart from all extraneous thoughts means prolonged struggle of an extraordinarily difficult and subtle kind. Subject to a multitude of the most varied influences and impressions with their perpetually shifting values, the ordinary man fails to grasp either their origin or their power. But the ascetic striver, the hesychast detached from all external influences, in his efforts, day and night, to reduce all outside impressions to the lowest possible minimum, shunning the outside world, deaf to all irrelevant discussions, reading no books, concentrates his whole attention on his inner being, and there engages in single combat with intrusive thoughts. This is the only way to discover the genus and power – colossal, sometimes – of intrusive thoughts. The man who is not sufficiently attentive within himself falls under the influence of an intrusive thought and becomes enslaved. By heeding the intrusive idea man comes to resemble – even identifies with – the spirit of the intrusive thought, and the energy contained in it. When his soul accepts a passionate thought – very often the consequence of demonic influence – he thereby becomes a tool for demonic action.

The mind deeply engrossed in prayer is sometimes aware of the approach of some spirit from without but if his prayerful attention is not disturbed, the intrusive thought departs without having been received, so that afterwards the one who was praying cannot say who, why or what had approached.

Sometimes something occurs in deep-set prayer that is difficult to explain. Lights appear around the mind, trying to attract the mind's attention to themselves, and if the mind refuses to pay attention, they, as it were, say to the mind, 'We bring you wisdom and understanding, and if you refuse us now, maybe you will never see us again.' But the experienced mind pays no attention whatever and they depart, not

only unaccepted but even unacknowledged. The mind does not know for sure if it was an evil enemy or a good angel; but does know by experience that if it stops to consider the brilliant thought, it loses prayer, and with great pains must seek it again. Experience shows that in the hour of prayer we must not listen even to good thoughts because if we do, other ideas will occur and, as the Staretz said, 'You will not continue undistracted.' Nothing can compensate for the loss of pure prayer.

In the struggle for freedom the ascetic's battle against intrusive thoughts is so intense as to be unimaginable without personal experience. In his inner battle against intrusive thoughts, in his downright opposition, the novice will often suffer partial defeat. But he may come out victorious and thus be able to analyse the nature of the thought so acutely that although he did not commit the sin suggested to him, he can recognise the action (energy) of the passion more profoundly, more compellingly, than anyone actually possessed by the sin. The latter may observe in himself and in others the energy manifested by one or other passion but to arrive at more basic knowledge it is essential to plumb the spiritual region where he dwells who prays according to the third form – that is, when the mind is united with the heart and sees every passion at the moment of conception.

This wondrous procedure, unimaginable to the idle majority, can only be adopted with great effort and by very few. It is not at all simple, not at all easy. (And I, in my efforts to express it briefly but clearly shall be obliged, more than once, to approach it helplessly, from various angles, without hope, however, of capturing and presenting it satisfactorily.)

The substance of the Staretz' ascetic path can be expressed in a few words – preserving the heart from every outside, irrelevant thought by concentrating the inner attention, by eliminating every alien influence, to stand before God in pure prayer.

This is termed *silence of the mind*. It is bequeathed to us in the lives and writings of the Holy Fathers from the first centuries of Christianity up to the present day, and so it is possible to talk about the Staretz' ascetic way, as he himself did, in speaking of Orthodox monasticism in general.

The Blessed Staretz said, 'If you are a theologian, your prayer is pure. If your prayer is pure, then you are a theologian.'

The monk-ascetic is not a theologian in the academic sense of the word but in another way he is, since pure prayer is deemed worthy of genuine divine visions. Pure prayer starts with struggle against the passions. As it cleanses itself from the passions, so the mind becomes stronger in the battle with intrusive thoughts, and firmer in prayer and awareness of God; while the heart, freed from the dark passions, begins to see all that is spiritual more clearly, more plainly – convincingly.

The monk prefers this course to that of theological science. For him speculation, be it theological or 'metaphysical', leads man to the boundary where it becomes clear that our empirical notions and attainments cannot be applied to God. Speculation results in a state when the mind begins to be still. But this 'stillness of the mind' in the theologian-philosopher is far from always being real contemplation of God, though it may come near to it.

Attaining to real contemplation without a preliminary cleansing of the heart is impossible. Only the heart purified of the passions is capable of the especial feeling of awe before the inscrutability of God. The mind joyfully is silent, powerless before the majesty of the vision.

The theologian and the monk-ascetic approach the state of contemplation by different paths. The monk-ascetic never cogitates. Like a doorkeeper he is only concerned to watch that nothing extraneous enters the heart. The Name of Christ and His commandment are what heart and mind live on in this 'hallowed silence'. They live a single life, alert to every-

thing happening within, not analysing logically but applying an especial spiritual sense.

The mind when joined with the heart is aware of every movement in the 'subconscious'. (I employ this term from contemporary scientific psychology conditionally, since it does not comply with the notions of orthodox ascetic anthropology.) Stationed within the heart, the mind observes the images and thoughts that appear, that come from the sphere of cosmic being and strive to take possession of man's heart and mind. The energy of this or that spirit assumes the form of an intrusive thought – that is, a thought linked with this or that image. The pressure exerted by intrusive thoughts is extraordinarily strong, and to subdue it the monk must all day long force himself to avoid every single 'interested' look, not allowing himself to become attached to anything. His constant battle is to reduce outside impressions to a strict minimum. Otherwise, when the hour comes for interior mental prayer everything that has made an impression will descend on the heart, causing great confusion.

The monk's purpose is to achieve continual vigilance of the mind in the heart; and when, after long years of such striving – which is the most difficult of all ascetic feats, harder than any other – the heart becomes more sensitive, while the mind, from *much weeping*, receives strength to thrust off the slightest hint of a passionate thought, then one's prayerful state can continue uninterrupted, and the feeling of God, present and active, becomes powerful and plain.

This is the way of the monk-ascetic, this the path that the Blessed Staretz trod.

The Areopagites took a different route. They gave priority to cogitation, not prayer. Those who set out on that track are often misled. Assimilating without difficulty intellectually even apophatic forms of theology, they content themselves with the intellectual delights experienced. Not attributing due significance to their unconquered passions, they

easily imagine that they have achieved what the Areopagites teach, whereas in the overwhelming majority of cases, while apprehending the logical structure of this theological system existentially they do not attain to the One they seek.

Hesychasm, the Staretz understood neither as living like a recluse nor distancing oneself in the desert, but as uninterrupted dwelling in God. In view of the immense importance of this question, let us consider it in more detail.

The Staretz used to say that neither reclusion nor moving into the desert can be more than a help – never an end in itself. Both can help to eliminate external impressions and influences by distancing one from human intercourse and so encouraging pure prayer but only in cases where withdrawal from the world occurred under divine auspices – never from self-will. In the latter instance, reclusion and desert-life and every other form of asceticism will continue to be fruitless, because the essence of our life is not arbitrary asceticism but obedience to the Divine will.

Many people think silence in the desert to be the noblest form of life. Others would opt for reclusion. Some would say, being a fool for Christ's sake. Still others elect for pastoral service or scientific theological study. And so on. The Staretz did not consider that any of these types of asceticism manifested spiritual life at its noblest but each of them could be so for someone if it conformed to God's will for that person. And God may have an especial purpose for each of us.

But whatever God's will for each individual, when it comes to choosing one or other form of ascetic life, or place, or manner of service, the quest for pure prayer remains imperative.

The Staretz considered prayer to be pure when it was accompanied by a softening of the heart so that both heart and mind in harmony lived the words of the prayer, which in this state nothing can cut short – the attention cannot be distracted, no irrelevant thought can intrude. As we have

seen, this kind of prayer is a normal religious condition, very productive for the soul. To one extent or another it is known to many believers but only in rare instances does it evolve into perfect prayer.

Another form of pure prayer is when the mind is enclosed in the heart and there in stillness, with no irrelevant thoughts and images, 'meditates in the Divine Name'.ⁱⁱ This kind of prayer is associated with continual ascetic striving. It is a process to a certain extent dependent on man's free will. It involves labour, austerity. All that has been said above concerning this wonderful form of mental prayer – that it enables one to perceive the intrusive thought before it introduces itself into the heart, to control one's 'subconscious', releases one from the turmoil provoked by influences of all kinds that spring up from the black depths of corrupt cosmic life – all this is the negative aspect of hesychastic prayer. The positive aspect transcends human conception.

God is Light inaccessible. His being is far superior to any image – not only material image but mental, too – and therefore so long as the human mind is concerned with thoughts, words, conceptions, images, it has not achieved perfection of prayer.

When the created human mind, the created human *persona*, stands before the Supreme Mind, before the Personal God, it attains to genuinely pure and perfect prayer, but only when from love of God every created thing is set aside is the world forgotten – as the Staretz was fond of saying – and one's very body so ignored that there is no telling whether one was in the body or outside the body in the hour of prayer.

Such pure – pure in the primary sense – prayer is a rare gift of God. It depends in no way on human effort. Divine power comes and with elusive care and ineffable tenderness transports man into the world of Divine light – or rather,

ⁱⁱ cf. Ps. i: 2.

Divine light appears and lovingly embraces the whole man, so that he can recall nothing, incapable of any thought.

This is the state the Staretz had in view when he said, 'He whose prayer is pure is a theologian.'

Without this practical knowledge, theology in the sense of beholding God is out of reach. The mind that has never known purity, that has never contemplated Divine light, however cultivated in its intellectual experience, is inevitably subject to the imagination, and in its attempts to know the Divine depends on conjectures, which, alas, only too often are mistaken for genuine revelation and divine visions.

Hesychasm – Christ's commandment to love God with all one's mind, and with all one's heart

In their ascetic writings certain of the Holy Fathers draw a distinction between two forms of spiritual life – active and contemplative. The former they called the way of the commandments.

Staretz Silouan thought somewhat otherwise. He, too, divided his life into the active and the contemplative but with the keeping of the commandments as the sole intention in each case. For him, the chief foundation of hesychasm was the first commandment – 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind'.ⁱⁱⁱ He writes:

'The man who has come to know the love of God will say to himself, "I have not kept this commandment. Though I pray day and night, and strive to practise every virtue, still have I failed in the commandment of love towards God. At rare moments only do I arrive at God's commandment, though at all times my soul longs to abide in it." When irrelevant thoughts intrude into the mind, the mind is then concerned both with God and with them, and so the commandment to love God "with *all* thy mind and *all* thy heart"

ⁱⁱⁱ Matt. xxii: 37.

is not fulfilled. But when the mind is entirely wrapped in God, to the exclusion of every other thought – that is fulfilling the first commandment, though again, not yet completely.’

In the ascetic experience of pure prayer the mind, divested of all images and concepts, is vouchsafed, after deep repentance and much weeping, authentic vision of God.

Hesychasm has always met with antagonism, especially in the West. Lacking the necessary experience, its opponents argue in the abstract and go so far as to see in the practice something mechanical, some spiritual technique leading to contemplation of the Divine. But this, of course, is not so.

Absolutely free, God is not subject to any automatic influence, any compulsion. Hesychasm requires great self-denial and is the most arduous of ascetic practices. The resolution to accept such suffering in order the better to observe the commandments attracts Divine grace if the effort is made in a spirit of humility.

Whatever the means he employs, the proud man will never attain to genuine union with God. Just by wishing it, man cannot unite the mind with the deep heart, and even if the mind does somehow penetrate into the heart, it will see only itself, its own created beauty – splendid, undoubtedly, having been created in the Divine image – but God Himself will not be found.

This is why the Blessed Staretz in his striving after humility seized on the fiery weapon given him by God:

‘Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.’

Here was no subtle intellectual talking, but a ‘simple’, and ‘ignorant’ man who many a time was found worthy of pure contemplation of God, and had, indeed, grounds for saying, ‘If you pray purely, you are a theologian.’ Or, ‘There are many on earth who believe but very few who *know* God.’

By ‘knowing God’ he meant, not gnostic theories, not

theological speculations, but the experience of lively communion, of real union with the Divine Light.

Knowledge is *co-existence* – that is, a sharing of being.

Anthropological Basis of Hesychasm

In setting out the Staretz' positive experience so far as I am able, I do not want to give a technical character to what I write, and so on principle I avoid making numerous parallels with, and references to the works of the holy Fathers.

This *exposé* is an attempt to portray the Staretz and describe his spiritual path, which, while entirely conforming to the traditions of the Orthodox Church, as an authentic, live manifestation, bears an original and unique seal.

This is not a theological tract. I pause to consider dogmatic points because dogmatic consciousness is organically linked to the whole *processus* of spiritual life. Any change in one's dogmatic consciousness means a corresponding mutation in the spiritual person and spiritual *ambiance* generally. And vice versa, the slightest deviation from the truth in our inner spiritual life will alter our dogmatic perspective.

On the subject of silence of the intellect which the Staretz was so attached to, it may not be superfluous at this point to sum up the anthropological background to the process. The following quotations from the works of St. Makarios and St. Isaac the Syrian, which the Staretz knew so well, may best express this:

St. Makarios says (First Discourse, paragraph 7):

'The soul is not divine by nature and nor does it belong to the shades of evil. It is a creature endowed with reason (*noera*), filled with great and wondrous beauty, in the likeness and image of God, and the wiles of the dark passions have penetrated into her because of her transgressions.'

'He whom God created after His own image was created exempt from the passions, which is why the passions are

not inherent in the nature of the soul. They constitute an outside element for which the soul *herself* is to blame.^{iv}

‘When the senses are contained in silence, one sees what treasures the soul contains.’ [*ibid.*]

When I said that the soul stablished in prayer in the heart perceives every thought that approaches the heart before it enters therein, by *thought* I mean the energy of the ‘evil passions’ that assail the soul from without, that are accessories, as St. Isaac said, and not inherent in the nature of the soul. All these additional elements – alien, intrusive factors – the mind stationed in the heart resists and repels with prayer.

But the mind can still more deeply penetrate into the heart when, by divine impulse, it so unites with the heart as to be divested of all images and concepts, while the heart is closed against every foreign element. Then the soul penetrates into the ‘darkness’ of a quite especial nature, and is subsequently deemed worthy of standing ineffably before God with a *pure* mind.

There is, however, a state superior to this, when man existentially and indisputably partakes of eternal life and ineffable rest in God. However, he does not continue long in this state if the Lord in His providence, which only He knows, would prolong his life on this earth. Man then returns to this world and, like St. Peter on Mt. Tabor, says of his inner dwelling with God, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here with Thee.’^v

Experience of Eternity

Hesychasm is such a rich and splendid life that any description of it sounds incoherent and contradictory. It would seem natural for many logically-minded people to be confused by the idea that man for a certain while may existentially be introduced into eternal life. It is obviously inconsistent to

^{iv} St. Isaac the Syrian, Logos 3.

^v cf. Mark ix: 5; Luke ix: 33.

speak of temporarily becoming eternal. But let me try to explain.

Time and eternity, as understood by the ascetic, are two different modes of being. Time is the mode of the creature, incomprehensibly created by God out of nothing, and for ever quickening and evolving. Eternity is the mode of Divine being to which our human conceptions of extension and succession do not apply. Eternity is a unique act of Divine being, an act of incomprehensible fulness, which, being transcendent, embraces in one point all the dimensions of the created world. Only the One God is eternal in substance. Eternity is not an abstraction, an entity existing separately, but is God Himself in His own Being. When it is God's good pleasure to give man grace and make him a partaker in Divine life, man becomes, not only immortal in the sense of having his life endlessly prolonged, but beginningless, too, for the sphere of Divine life into which he is lifted has neither beginning nor end. By 'beginningless', I do not mean to imply a pre-existence of the soul or a transmutation of our created nature into unoriginate Divine nature – I mean a sharing in God's unoriginate life consequent on the deification of the creature by an act of grace.

Man discovers his real self at the deepest roots of his nature when mind and heart, turned towards Christ, are joined – not by his own efforts but by the action of God – in mystic union. He then, as an immortal hypostasis, his mind made in God's image, his spirit godlike, sightlessly beholds God. Yet so long as he is tied to the flesh, his knowledge will not attain perfection. He will not be able to fathom what his eternal existence will be like after he has traversed the last stage of his earthly one – that is, been delivered of the grossness of the earthly body and, unburdened, has entered 'into that within the veil', should God see fit to receive his soul. But he will not wonder about eternal life in moments of vision when his soul is entirely in the eternal God and does not know whether she is in the body or outside it, but

only when the soul sees the world again and once more feels herself fettered by her corporeal bonds.

Man does not possess eternal life in himself – that is, within the confines of his created being. He becomes eternal by the gift of grace when he communicates in Divine life, yet here below this experience of eternity does vary in might. In so far as we are in God, we are eternal. (*In so far* is meant here, not in a quantitative sense but applies to the nature of the gift granted by God.)

The soul in a state of vision has no questions to ask. She does not bring about by her own will the indescribable act which introduces her into the divine world, because she cannot desire what she has never known. Still, this act does not take place without her participation, in that at some preliminary moment of her own free will she has ardently aspired towards God in the keeping of His commandments. The prelude to the vision is suffering and the repentance which comes from the deep heart, those scalding tears that burn up in man the pride of flesh and spirit.

Man while he is in the flesh cannot attain to perfect knowledge but God does give him an actual, indubitable, existential experience of the Eternal Kingdom. He may know ‘in part’, as the Staretz says, but his knowledge is *sure*.

He who is made in the ‘image’ of God is made for life ‘after His likeness’, also. The man who has found salvation in God receives life in the likeness of God’s own life. God is omnipresent and omniscient, and the saints in the Holy Spirit receive a likeness of that omnipresence and omniscience. God is Light, and the saints in the Holy Spirit become light. God is Love encompassing all that exists, and the saints in the Holy Spirit embrace the universe in their love. God is All-Holy, and the saints in the Holy Spirit are holy. Holiness is not an ethical but an ontological concept. A man is not holy because his morals or conduct are good, or even because he leads a righteous life in the sense of devoting himself to spiritual endeavour and prayer – indeed, the Pharisees kept

the fasts and made 'long' prayers. But that man is holy who bears within himself the Holy Spirit. The One God is Truth and Life, and those who communicate in the Holy Spirit become true and have life; whereas those who fall away from God suffer spiritual death and depart into 'outer darkness'.

To say that man who was called into life out of nothingness by a creative act of God does not possess eternal life within himself does not mean that in dying he returns to nothingness, to non-existence. Gifted with freedom, when he turns away from God he leaves Light and Life for perpetual death and outer darkness; but this darkness and death do not correspond to that nothingness, that non-existence, out of which the creature was called into being. It is the 'state' of the 'reasonable being' indestructible in his nature. Turning away from God, the creature, however, cannot find any realm inaccessible to Him. Even in hell Divine love will embrace all men, but, while this love is joy and life for them that love God, it is torment for those that hate Him.

In writing about the experience of eternity and the resurrection of the soul, I am thinking of the mighty Divine goodwill that, poured down on man, catches him up into the realm of Eternal Light, where he can live with certainty his freedom from death, his eternity.^{vi}

Although on his 'return' from this vision a kind of veil shrouds him again, he yet finds that both his personal cognition and his perception of the world have altered radically, and for numerous reasons cannot but be modified. The incidence of his fall and sufferings reveals a like tragedy in every other human being. The perception of one's own immortality results in one seeing in every other human being an immortal brother. The lively sense of eternity and interior contemplation of God unconnected with creation fill the soul in an incomprehensible manner with love for man and every other living creature. It becomes clear that only after one has

^{vi} cf. II Cor. xii: 2, 4.

known the grandeur of man in his spiritual understanding can one really appreciate and love one's fellow being.

Here is another inexplicable phenomenon – at the moment of vision, as the Staretz expressed it, 'the world is quite forgot'. Time in the vision is not time for cogitation. Normal discursive thinking ceases. The intellect continues to function but quite differently. So it is surprising that when this experience of a sphere devoid of any materiality is over, it resumes the form of thoughts and feelings. The state of vision is the light of Divine love, and this love begets new feelings in the soul and new thoughts about God and the world.

The first 'ecstasy' of vision is given to man from on high without his seeking it, since, ignorant of it, he could not look for it. But then, later, he cannot forget it, and sad at heart he seeks it again and again, not only for himself but for everyone else, too.

The Start of Spiritual Life – Struggle against the Passions

On the subject of hesychastic prayer, let me add here a few words of explanation of the process and its consequences.

By prayerfully fixing his attention in his heart, the ascetic strives to preserve his intellect from all thought. Thoughts may be natural in everyday life but they can also be consequent on satanic influence. In prayer, the ascetic renounces for the time being, to the degree that he finds possible (which differs from man to man), the needs of his nature. Thoughts of demonic origin, he excludes altogether. This means that the mind at prayer rejects all thought, both natural and demonic.

When he succumbs to satanic influence man suffers the loss of his godlike freedom and falls away from Divine life. The ascetic label for this state is 'passion'. The term implies, on the one hand the idea of passiveness and servitude, and, on the other, that of suffering in the sense of disintegration and death. 'Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.'

And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.^{vii.} So then, the state of sinful passion contains two aspects of suffering – enslavement and disintegration. This is why the ‘slave of sin’ cannot have any authentic perception of the godlike freedom of men as children of God.

The passions possess a power of attraction but no passionate image or thought can ever enter and take root in the soul without man’s consent, for in all cosmic existence there is *nothing* powerful enough to deprive the free man of the possibility of resisting and rejecting. But when a prurient thought or image takes root in the soul man finds himself in one measure or another possessed. The passions signify the state of being possessed in varying degrees of intensity.

Passions attract by promising delights. Suffering in the sense of disintegration is the result of passionate delights. If a passionate impulse held no moment of charm but started immediately with suffering, it could not incline man’s will to itself. Passion *qua* suffering and death can be identified instantly only by the spiritual person who has known the life-giving action of divine grace that begets a repulsion in the soul, a ‘hatred’ for all sinful pressures within her.

The starting-point of spiritual life is the struggle against the passions. If this struggle only meant renouncing worldly pleasures, it would be easy. The second stage in the struggle is the more difficult – when passion, unsatisfied, starts to torment one with all kinds of infirmity. Here the ascetic needs great and continuous patience, since the salutary consequences of resistance to the passions are not quick to ensue.

It is normal for man in his fallen state to continue in this struggle throughout his life but there are two extremes where there is no struggle. The impassible man does not have to wrestle because the delights suggested by the passion are no temptation to him, and only the bare idea remains. And the

^{vii.} John viii: 34–35.

one who is subject to the onslaught of *thoughts* but remains impervious to their power can be termed passion-free. On the other hand, total subjection can also be marked by absence of struggle but this time because at every stage in the development of the prurient thought no opposition is offered – indeed, it is met with half-way and experienced.

In his earthly existence in the flesh man also has carnal feelings that are not sinful – needs, for instance, that left unsatisfied curtail life. Food, for example, sleep and so on. For brief periods the ascetic may ignore these needs, and if they start to threaten with illness and the ascetic is ready to face death rather than give in, God takes even more care of him. This courageous determination is imperative. Otherwise, there is no avoiding intrusive thoughts, even briefly.

Plunged deep in the heart, the mind by being absorbed in prayer detaches itself from every image, not only visual but mental, too, and in this state of purity is deemed worthy to stand before God; and the end-product of this shapeless profundity – even if later on it translates itself into a thought or image of some kind, is not now a passion but authentic life in God.

In this state we discover that the soul instinctively aspires to God, and is like unto Him and is free from passions by nature.

These alternating states – the coming and going of grace – convince man that he ‘has no life in himself’, that his life is in God. Disjunction from God means death. When the soul is deemed worthy of the coming of divine light, she then genuinely lives life eternal – that is, God Himself. And where God is, there is a *freedom* impossible to describe in words, because man is then beyond death and fear.

In this state man knows himself, and in knowing himself he knows man in general by virtue of the consubstantiality of the whole human race.

In his depths, there, where the genuine resemblance to God of the human nature is revealed, where his high calling

is manifest, the ascetic sees things unknown to the man who has not entered into his own heart.

In his funeral canticles St. John Damascene writes,

‘I weep and lament when I think of death and see lying in the grave our beauty, created in the image of God, disfigured and bereft of glory.’

Thus do all weep and lament who have known in Christ the primordial fairness of man when they return from the ineffable spiritual banquet in the deep recesses of the heart, and see the world bereft of beauty and glory.

VII

The Imagination and the Ascetic Struggle against its Various Aspects

Having ventured to write about the ‘sacred stillness’ which the Staretz so loved, I am brought to enquire into the necessity for the ascetic to wrestle with the imagination – though I cannot hope satisfactorily to treat so difficult and complex a theme. As my principal task is to offer the reader an *exposé* of a definite and concrete experience, I shall restrict myself to examining the views and conceptions obtaining to this day on the Holy Mountain – views and conceptions which Staretz Silouan likewise held. Contemporary psychological theories may be left aside as having little in common with the approach of Orthodox anthropological concepts.

The Staretz writes:

‘O brethren, let us forget the earth and all that therein is. The earth entices us from contemplation of the Holy Trinity, Which our minds cannot apprehend but Which the Saints in heaven behold in the Holy Spirit. We for our part, should continue in prayer without imaginings . . .’

‘When the soul in the Holy Spirit comes to know the Lord, she never ceases to marvel at God’s mercy, at His majesty and power, and the Lord Himself, of His grace, gently, like a mother with her beloved child, trains the soul to have good and humble thoughts, giving her to feel His presence and nearness, and the soul in humility contemplates the Lord and has no other thoughts.’

Imagination manifests itself in the most varied forms. The

ascetic has to contend, first of all, with those forms of imagination which are connected with the grosser passions of the flesh. He knows that every passion has its corresponding image, since it belongs to the sphere of created being, inevitably existing in one or another image. Usually a lustful thought acquires strength in man when the image is accepted and gains the attention of the mind. If the mind spurns the image, the passion itself cannot develop and will expire. For instance, supposing some desire of the flesh – a physiologically normal desire, maybe – comes to the ascetic, he will defend his mind from the image from without, suggested by the passion. And if the mind does not accept the image, the passion cannot develop into action and will expire without fail. The word *mind* as used here denotes, not reason – logical deliberation – but something perhaps best described as ‘inner attention’. If the mind, understood in this sense, is preserved from passionate images, perfect chastity is possible throughout a whole lifetime, even when the body is robust. Centuries of ascetic experience prove this, and we have a further example in the Staretz. Conversely, if the mind accepts and enjoys the passionate image, even a frail diseased or exhausted body will be tyrannised by the energy contained therein.

So, too, with another passion – hatred. It also has an image *sui generis*. So long as the mind abstains from commerce with the image, the passion cannot evolve. But if the mind unites with the image, hatred will grow more and more violent, even becoming an obsession.

Another form of imagination against which the ascetic has to struggle is day-dreaming. When he gives himself over to reverie, man abandons the real order of things in the world, to go and live in the domain of fantasy. Since the imagination cannot create anything out of nothing, the figments engendered by it must contain elements borrowed from the actual world, just as dreams do, and therefore they are not quite unattainable. A poor man may imagine he is an emperor, a prophet, a great scientist. History knows cases of poor men

from the lowest strata of society who became emperors and the like but this does not generally happen with *day-dreamers*.

Pondering the solution of some problem, a technical one, for instance, sets the imagination working, together with the memory. This kind of intellectual activity is of immense significance in human culture, and essential to man's development. The ascetic, however, in his desire for pure prayer tends to put up a resistance to acquisition of any kind, not only material but intellectual, also, lest this kind of imagination hinder him from 'offering to God his first thought, his first energy' – that is, concentrating his whole self in God.

Finally, consider the play of the imagination when the intellect attempts to penetrate the mystery of being and apprehend the Divine world. Such endeavours inevitably involve the imagination, to which many are inclined to give the high-flown label, divine inspiration. The ascetic, devoting himself to active inner silence and pure prayer, resolutely combats this 'creative' impulse within himself because he sees in it a *processus* contrary to the true order of being, with man 'creating' God in his own image and likeness.

The point of departure of the ascetic striving for pure prayer is the belief that God created us, not that we create God, and so he turns to Him in imageless prayer, stripped of all theological and philosophical activity. If grace descends upon him and it is granted to him to savour the advent of God, then this knowledge of God which is above all forms will afterwards be translated into this or that shape, not, however, of the ascetic's or prophet's own invention but received by him from above.

The ascetic seeks God his Creator through prayer, and God in His indulgence and according to His good will grants knowledge of Himself in modes accessible to man – modes which consume his passions and hallow him; but if man assumes them to be the supreme revelation he will fall into error and even the images granted from on High may become an insurmountable barrier to more perfect knowledge of God.

Whereas the creative thought of God becomes a reality and is materialised in the world, the free movement of the created being follows the reverse route, relinquishing things created and seeking God Himself, since in Him lie the ultimate end and meaning of man's existence. The world is not self-sufficient. It does not exist of and for itself. Its purpose is the final transfiguration of the creature through knowledge of the Creator.ⁱ

The reason for the creation of the world was God's abundant goodness. The world was not created as a means to the Incarnation of God the Word, for the Incarnation was not in the least a *necessity* for the Logos. The creation of the world was, therefore, in no sense a preliminary act to the Incarnation.

The condescension of the Logos is not a token of the intrinsic worth of the world. To understand its purpose and meaning we must look to the name taken by the humbly incarnate God the Word – *Jesus the Saviour*. 'And thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.'ⁱⁱ

God is not the 'ideal' world in the sense of the world of ideas; and the form of our given empirical being is not the realisation of the divine ideal world – that is, the realisation without which even Divine being itself would be incomplete, imperfect.

Man's creative idea, oriented towards the world, must seek its incarnation – its realisation – if it would complete its development. But in the Divine world this is not so – the Incarnation of God the Word is not the crowning stage in a theogonic process and consequently indispensable to God Himself in order to perfect the fulness of His Being.

This, briefly, is the dogmatic basis of hesychastic prayer.

Hesychastic prayer is neither artistic creation nor scientific investigation; neither philosophic research and speculation

ⁱ cf. John xvii:3.

ⁱⁱ Matt. i:21.

nor abstract intellectual theology. The spiritual life does not mean satisfying our emotional desires, as do the arts, for instance. All these activities, some noble, some less so, relate to the sphere of the imagination which must be overcome if one is to attain perfect prayer, true theology and a life verily pleasing to God.

Therefore, the Orthodox ascetic seeks the true God the Creator, entering through mental prayer into conflict with an innumerable variety of images, some having outward forms, contours, colours and extension in space and time, others being thought-forms – conceptions. He strips himself of all created images in order to be able to pray to God, *face to Face*.

God creates the world, and this creation is a con-descension. But man's movement towards God is an ascension. In rising from the created world towards God, the ascetic does not deny the reality and value of the creation. All he does is not to regard it as an absolute, not to deify it or consider it an end and a value in itself. God did not create the world in order that He Himself might live the life of the creature. He created it in order to associate man with His own Divine Life. And when man does not arrive at deification, which cannot be achieved without his own collaboration, the very meaning of his existence disappears. Correspondingly, when man, conscious of his divine vocation, contemplates the work of the Creator, he is seized with a wonder which, while giving him a very vivid perception of everything in this created world, at the same time detaches him from every created being for the sake of contemplating God. This detachment is not a renunciation of created life in the sense of a rejection or denial of it as an illusion. Nor is it a poetic or philosophic flight into a realm of lofty and beautiful images or 'pure' ideas which sooner or later lead into an imaginary world. No, this detaching is a *yearning* for the true and living God because of our love for Him, because of our calling to live in God, the End of ends and the Value of values. In God there is accomplishment, having no need

of incarnation. In God there is perfection excluding all conflict and tragicalness. God is not 'beyond good and evil' for He 'is light, and in him is no darkness at all.'ⁱⁱⁱ

The simple and humble believer frees himself from the domination of the imagination by a wholehearted aspiration to live according to God's will. This is so simple, and at the same time so 'hid from the wise and prudent'^{iv} that there are no words to explain it.

Such seeking for the Divine will involves renouncing the world. The soul wants to live with God, according to God and not after her own fashion, and therefore renounces her own will and fancies, which, unable to create any real existence out of nothing, are instead 'outer darkness'.

The world of the human will and imagination is the world of mirages. It is common to man and the fallen angels, and imagination is, therefore, often a conductor of demonic energy.

Such demonic images and those conjured up by man may influence people, altering or transforming them, but one thing is inevitable – every image, whether created by man himself or suggested by demons, and accepted by the soul, will distort the spiritual image of man created in the image and after the likeness of God. This 'creation' in its ultimate development leads to the self-divinization of the creature – that is, to the affirmation of the divine principle as contained in the very nature of man. Because of this, natural religion – religion of the human mind – may fatefully assume a pantheistic character.

Both demonic images and those conjured up by man may acquire very considerable force, not because they are real in the ultimate sense of the word, like the Divine strength which creates out of nothing, but in so far as the human will is drawn to and shaped by such images. But the Lord liber-

ⁱⁱⁱ. I John i:5.

^{iv}. Matt. xi:25; Luke x:21.

ates him who repents from the sway of passion and imagination, and the Christian thus liberated laughs at the power of images.

The power of cosmic evil over man is colossal, and such as no son of Adam can overcome without Christ and outside Christ. He is Jesus the Saviour, in the literal and sole sense of the word. This is the Orthodox ascetic's belief, and he therefore pursues the prayer of inner stillness by the unceasing invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ, which is why this prayer is called the Jesus Prayer.

The many manifestations of the imagination which disfigure the spiritual life, the Staretz reduced to the four patterns previously indicated.^v The first of them concerns the fight in general against all passion.

The second applies to those who practise the first form of prayer and indulge in 'visual meditation' – who conjure up scenes from the life of Christ or similar sacred studies. It is generally neophytes who adopt this course. With this sort of imaginative prayer the mind is not contained in the heart for the sake of inner vigilance. The attention stays fixed on the visual aspect of the images considered as divine. This leads to psychological (emotional) excitement, which, carried to an extreme, may result in a state of pathological ecstasy. One rejoices in what one has 'attained', clings to the state, cultivates it, considers it to be 'spiritual', charismatic (the fruits of grace) and so sublime that one thinks oneself a saint and worthy of contemplating Divine mysteries. But in fact such states end in hallucinations, and if one does not succumb to physical illness, at the least one continues 'bewitched' and living in a world of fantasy.

The third and fourth forms of the imagination (connected with the second mode of prayer) may be said to lie at the root of all rationalist culture, which makes it particularly difficult for an educated man to ignore them with their

^v cf. Chapter vi.

spiritual wealth. This leads to a curious phenomenon which I have often observed – that simple, unlettered ascetic strivers attached to mental prayer often attain to greater heights and purity than educated men who in the overwhelming majority of cases stop at the second form of prayer.

Profoundly religious and ascetically-minded people soon grasp that the third form of imagination is directed earthwards, and so its obvious incompatibility with prayer simplifies the struggle against it during prayer.

It is otherwise with the fourth form, which is often so subtle as to appear to be life in God. Its exceptional importance in the ascetic life obliges us to consider it now in more detail.

Day-dreaming characterised the first form of prayer. The temptation to achieve everything by way of the reason predominates in the second. Here life is concentrated in the brain. The mind is not united with the heart – it is perpetually turned outwards in its aspiration to understand and master all things. Possessed of some genuine – though still insufficient – religious experience, those who pray thus aspire with their intellect to fill the gaps in their experience and penetrate the mysteries of Divine being, and then *inevitably* they fall into the error of ‘conceptualising’ God. Carried away, they do not want to – or cannot – understand that they are overturning the true hierarchy of being, the real order of things, and having, as it were, forgotten that God created us in His own image and likeness, themselves start to create, introducing into Divine being elements in their own image, after their own likeness. The ideal sphere in which they move gives them an apparent superiority over others, which intensifies their self-confidence.

The typical distortion brought about by this second form of prayer is intellectualism.

The theologian who is an intellectual constructs his system as an architect builds a palace or a church. Empirical and

metaphysical concepts are the material he uses, and he is more concerned with the magnificence and logical symmetry of his ideal edifice than that it should conform to the actual order of things.

Strange as it may seem, many great men have been unable to withstand this, in effect, artless temptation, the hidden cause of which is pride. One becomes attached to the fruits of one's intelligence as a mother to her child. The intellectual loves his creation as himself, identifies with it, shuts himself up with it. When this happens no human intervention can help him – if he will not renounce what he believes to be riches, he will never attain to pure prayer and true contemplation.

Those who seek the highest form of prayer – the uniting of the mind with the heart – know how hard such renunciation is.

Many theologians of the philosopher type, remaining essentially rationalists, rise to supernatural or, rather, supralogical spheres of thought but these spheres are not yet the Divine world. They lie within the confines of human created nature and, as such, are within reach of the understanding in the natural order of things. Their mental visions cannot be circumscribed within the framework of formal logic since they enter the domain of metalogic and antinomic reasoning. Nevertheless, they are still the result of the activity of the reason.

The overcoming of discursive thinking is proof of high intellectual culture but it is not yet true faith and real divine vision. People in this category, who often possess capacities for rational reflection, because of this come to realise that the laws of human thought are of limited validity, and that it is impossible to encircle the whole universe within the steel loops of logical syllogism. This enables them to arrive at a supramental contemplation but what they then contemplate is still merely beauty created in the Divine image. Since those who enter for the first time into this sphere of the

‘silence of the mind’ experience a certain mystic awe, they mistake their contemplation for mystical communion with the Divine, whereas in reality they are still within the confines of created human nature. The mind, it is true, here passes beyond the frontiers of time and space, and it is this that gives it a sense of grasping eternal wisdom. This is as far as human reason can go along the path of natural development and self-contemplation. This experience of the limitations of the intellect, whatever the dogmatic interpretation one applies, relates it to pantheism.

Attaining these bounds where ‘day and night come to an end’^{vi} man contemplates the beauty of his own mind which many identify with Divine being. They do see a light but it is not the True Light in which there ‘is no darkness at all’.^{vii} It is the natural light peculiar to the mind of man created in God’s image.

This mental light, which excels every other light of empirical knowledge, might still just as well be called *darkness*, since it is the darkness of divestiture and God is not in it. And perhaps in this instance more than any other we should listen to the Lord’s warning, ‘Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.’^{viii} The first prehistoric, cosmic catastrophe – the fall of Lucifer, son of the morning, who became the prince of darkness – was due to his enamoured contemplation of his own beauty, which ended up in his self-deification.

Those who have stood in these places of the spirit may ask in dismay, ‘Where are we to look for a criterion by which to distinguish genuine communion with God from delusion?’

Blessed Staretz Silouan explicitly asserted that we have such a criterion – love for enemies. He said,

‘The Lord is meek and humble, and loves His creature.

^{vi}. Job xxvi:10.

^{vii}. I John i:5.

^{viii}. Luke xi:35.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is humble love for enemies and prayer for the whole world. And if you do not have this love, ask and the Lord Who said, "Ask, and it shall be given you"^{ix} will grant it to you.'

Let no one make so bold as to belittle this 'psychological' canon, for the state it relates to is the direct result of divine action. God-the-Saviour saves man utterly. He sanctifies not only his spirit but also his psyche with its emotions, and even his body.

We but touch here on the most complex, age-old questions pertaining to man's spiritual existence – questions which are scarcely capable of a dialectical explanation such as would make them logically intelligible. Only faith and existential experience can bring understanding but such experience does not depend solely on man's will – it is a gift from on high.

Christian life is a harmony between two wills, the Divine and the human. God can appear to all men, whatever their course, at every moment in time and in all places. But, Himself beyond constraint, He never invades the freedom of man, His image, and if the creature uses his freedom to turn inwards in self-love, or to regard himself as the uncreated divine principle, the door will be closed to the action of Divine grace, whatever heights of contemplation may be reached.

Communion with God is arrived at through prayer, and this study is precisely a study of prayer. If to a certain extent I enter into the field of dialectics, it is not in the hope of convincing by argument but simply to observe that the paths of prayer traverse even this sphere of human existence. Every attempt to rationalise spiritual experience may be met with a variety of objections, because each one of us, in the ideal

^{ix}. Matt. vii:7.

realm of his own contemplation of the world, is at liberty to establish whatever scale of values he pleases.

To continue, then, with our inquiry into the subject of prayer, let us examine in broad outline the bitter conflict – the fight against intellectual imagination – which the Orthodox ascetic must engage in if he would progress from prayer which is intellectual meditation to the true prayer of the mind stationed in the heart.

In studying himself attentively, man discovers that his rational thinking possesses a psychological property which can be defined as an intrinsic authenticity in our thinking, or, to put it another way, as subjective evidence that our logical deductions are correct. There is a certain compulsion in the arguments of reason, and high culture and profound spiritual experience are necessary if we are to bring this strange deception to light. But to liberate oneself from its power, Divine help is essential.

It is possible to a certain extent to uncover this delusion by analysing the mechanism that governs our thinking – the law of identity and the law of sufficient grounds.

The law of identity represents the static moment in our thinking, its fixed point, lifeless because of its rigidity.

The law of sufficient grounds is the dynamic moment in our thinking. Centuries-old experience affords convincing proof of the extreme relativity of this law. Opinion as to whether grounds are satisfactory is always subjective – what will satisfy one man will not do so for another. And if we look more closely we shall see that in reality reason is never quite enough.

The Orthodox ascetic brings to light the relativity of our thinking in another way, just as he finds other solutions to all the problems of our existence – namely, the medium of faith and of prayer. He does not put his trust in his own feeble judgment but in Almighty God. He believes that Christ's commandments are the infallible touchstone, a

canon of truth, since they are Divine strength and eternal life itself. This belief stands him on perpetual trial before the Judgment Seat of God, the only true bar of justice. Every deed, every word, every thought or feeling, though given no outward expression, is submitted to the crucible of Christ's word.

When the grace of the Holy Spirit enters and becomes an active force in us our souls naturally incline towards the perfection of the commandments; but when periods of abandonment by God set in, and the Divine light is replaced by the heavy darkness of the passions in revolt, a great change takes place in us and conflict rends the soul.

The spiritual struggle is a manifold struggle but the struggle against pride strikes deepest and is the most grievous. Pride is the supreme antagonist of Divine law, deforming the Divine order of being and everywhere bringing ruin and death in its train. Pride manifests itself partly on the physical plane but more essentially on the plane of thought and spirit. It arrogates priority for itself, battling for complete mastery, and its principal weapon is the reasoning mind.

The reasoning mind, for example, will reject the commandment 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'^x as nonsensical, urging that the faculty of being able to judge is a distinctive quality in man, which makes him superior to the whole world and affords him the power to dominate.

In order to assert its superiority, the reasoning mind points to its achievements, to its creativeness, producing many convincing proofs purporting to show that in the age-old experience of history the establishment or affirmation of truth falls entirely within its province.

The reason, functioning impersonally, is by nature only one of the manifestations of life in the human personality, one of the energies of the personality. Where it is allotted priority in the spiritual being of man, it begins to fight against its source – that is, its personal origin.

^x. Matt. vii:1.

Rising, as he thinks, to the furthest heights; descending, as he believes, to the lowest depths, man aspires to contact the frontiers of being, in order, as is his way, to define it, and when he cannot achieve his purpose he succumbs and decides that 'God does not exist'.

Then, continuing the struggle for predominance, boldly and at the same time miserably, he says to himself,

'If there is a God, how can I accept that I am not that God?'

Not having reached the frontiers of being and having attributed to himself this infinity, he stands up arrogantly and declares, 'I have explored everything and nowhere found anything greater than myself, so – I am God.'

And it is a fact that when man's spiritual being is concentrated on and in the mind, reason takes over and he becomes blind to anything that surpasses him and ends by seeing himself as the divine principle.

The intellectual imagination here reaches its utmost limits and, at the same time, its fall into the darkest night.

Some people endorse these pretensions on the part of the reason, accepting them as valid, but the Orthodox ascetic struggles against them. The combat reveals the intervention of strange outside forces, the battle against which may turn tragic. Only through faith can the ascetic win the fight, faith which overcomes the world. 'For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'^{xi}

There is no comfortable armchair in the study for the monk to work out these problems. In the silence of the night, remote from the world, unheard and unseen, he falls down before God and weeps the prayer of the publican, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,'^{xii} or cries with St. Peter, 'Lord, save me.'^{xiii}

^{xi}. I John v:4.

^{xii}. Luke xviii:13.

^{xiii}. Matt. xiv:30.

In spirit he sees the abyss of 'outer darkness' opening wide before him, and so his prayer is ardent. There is no describing the mystery of this vision or the intensity of the struggle, which may last for years until the heart is purified of all passion, until the Divine light appears which reveals the falsity of our former judgments – the Light which leads the soul to the infinite expanses of true life.

I had many a discussion with the Staretz on this subject. He would declare that the trouble lay, not in reason as such, but in our pride of spirit. Pride strengthens the action of the imagination, whereas humility suspends it. Pride bristles with desire to create its own world, whereas humility is quick to receive life from God.

Long years of warfare had given the Staretz the power to stay his mind steadfastly in God, rejecting all intrusive thoughts. He had suffered much in his battle against the enemy but when I knew him he would speak of the past with great peace of mind and very simply.

'Mind wrestles with mind – our minds with the mind of the enemy. The enemy fell through pride and the imagination, and would draw us in his wake . . . We have need of great fortitude in this struggle . . . The Lord leaves His servant to fight, and watches him as He watched while St. Antony wrestled with evil spirits . . . You remember how in *The Life of St. Antony* it says that he took up his abode in a tomb where demons beat him insensible. The friend who looked after the Saint carried him to the village church but in the night when St. Antony recovered consciousness he entreated his friend to take him back to the tomb. Too injured to stand on his feet, he prayed lying down. But a fresh onslaught of devils beset him. In the midst of cruel tortures, raising his eyes he beheld a great light and recognised the presence of the Lord. Whereupon he cried, "Where wert Thou, O merciful Jesus, when the enemy were tormenting me?"

'And the Lord answered him,

‘ “I was here, O Antony, and witnessed thy valour.”

‘We must always remember that the Lord sees us wrestling with the enemy, and so we need never be afraid. Even should all hell fall upon us, we must be brave.

‘The Saints learned how to do battle with the enemy. They knew that the enemy uses intrusive thoughts to deceive us, and so all through their lives they declined such thoughts. At first sight there seems to be nothing wrong about an intrusive thought but soon it begins to divert the mind from prayer, and then stirs up confusion. The rejection of all intrusive thoughts, however apparently good, is therefore essential, and equally essential is it to have a mind pure in God . . . But should an intrusive thought approach, there is no cause to be troubled. Put your trust in God and continue in prayer. We must not be troubled, because that rejoices the enemy. Pray, and the intrusive thought will leave you. *This is the way of the Saints.*’

The Staretz used to say that there was no end to the pretensions of pride. In his notes I found the following fable:

‘A certain huntsman liked stalking the woods and fields for game. One day after he had been climbing up a steep hill for hours tracking his prey, exhausted, he sat down on a large boulder to rest. Seeing a flight of birds soaring from one summit to another, he began to think, “Why didn’t God give wings to man, so that I could fly?” Just then a humble hermit walked by, divined the huntsman’s thought and said to him,

‘ “There you are, sitting and complaining to yourself that God has not given you wings; but if you had wings, you would still be discontented and say, ‘My wings are feeble and I can’t fly to heaven with them to see what it’s like there.’ And were you then given wings strong enough to lift you to heaven, you would still be dissatisfied and say, ‘I don’t understand what goes on in heaven.’ And were you to be given understanding of this, you would again be discontented and say, ‘Why am I not an angel?’ Were you to be turned into a cherubim you would say, ‘Why doesn’t

God let me rule over heaven?’ And if it were given you to rule over heaven you would still be dissatisfied and, like another we all know, insolently seek more. Therefore I tell you, humble yourself at all times, and be content with the gifts you are given, and then you will be living with God.”

‘The huntsman saw that the hermit spoke the truth, and thanked God for sending him a monk to give him understanding and set him on the path of humility.’

The Staretz insisted that the Saints were concerned, through the humbling of self, to purge the mind of all imagination.

‘The Saints all said, “I shall suffer torments in hell” – even though they performed great miracles. They had learned by experience that if the soul condemns herself to hell but trusts the while in God’s compassion, the strength of God enters into her, and the Holy Spirit bears clear witness of salvation. The soul grows humble through self-condemnation, and there is then no place in her for intrusive thoughts, and she stands before God with a pure mind. *This is the wisdom of the spirit.*’

With iron drills men drill the earth’s crust for oil, and are successful. With their intellectual powers they drill heaven for the fire of Divinity but are rejected of God because of their pride.

Divine contemplation is accorded to man, not in those precise moments when he seeks it, and it alone, but when his soul descends into the hell of repentance and does really feel that she is the meanest of creatures. Contemplation forcibly attained, as it were, through the reason is not true but only seeming contemplation. To accept such contemplation as truth creates conditions in the soul which may prevent the action of grace and make genuine contemplation impossible.

Knowledge revealed in the contemplation which proceeds from grace surpasses even the most sublime creations of the imagination, as St. Paul affirmed when he said, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart

of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.^{xiv} When man, as happened to the Apostles, has been caught up by grace into a vision of Divine Light, he afterwards translates into theology the things he has seen and known. Authentic theology consists, not in the conjectures of man's reason or the results of critical research but in a statement of the life into which man has been introduced by the action of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes words come readily, sometimes it is hard to find the right concepts, the right terms, in which to communicate what is above earthly image and concept. But in spite of these difficulties, and the inevitable existence of divers modes of conveying such knowledge, the man who *knows by experience* will recognise true contemplation even if it be communicated in unfamiliar form, and will distinguish it from illusory, rational conjecture, however brilliant.

^{xiv}. I Cor. ii:9.

VIII

Uncreated Divine Light and Ways of Contemplation

Uncreated Divine Light by its nature is absolutely different from ordinary physical light. Contemplating it begets, first and foremost, an all-absorbing feeling of the living God – an immaterial feeling of the Immaterial One, a noetic, yet not a rational perception which with irresistible force transports man into another world but so warily that he neither realises when it happens nor knows whether he is in or out of the body. At the time he is more effectively, more deeply conscious of himself than he ever is in everyday life, yet he forgets both himself and the world, carried away by the sweetness of the love of God. In spirit he beholds the Invisible, breathes Him, is wholly in Him.

This supramental, all-engulfing sensation of the living God is accompanied by a vision of light, of light essentially different from physical light. Man himself then abides in light, becomes assimilated with the light which he contemplates, and is spiritualised by it. He then neither sees nor feels his own materiality or the materiality of the world.

The vision comes incomprehensibly. Its approach is unexpected. It appears neither from without nor even from within but unaccountably encompasses the spirit of man, lifting him into the world of Divine Light; and afterwards he cannot say whether he was in ecstasy – whether his soul had left his body – because he did not notice any return to the body. (Thus there is nothing pathological about such an experience.)

God operates, man receives; and space and time, birth and death, sex and age, social or hierarchical status – all cease to exist for him.

The Lord is come. In His mercy the Unoriginate Prince and Light of life everlasting has come to visit the repentant soul.

Contemplation of Divine Light is unfettered by circumstance. Dark of night and light of day are alike propitious. Sometimes the Light comes to man in such fashion that he remains conscious both of his own body and of the world outside. He can then stay open-eyed and simultaneously behold *two* lights, the physical and the Divine. It is this kind of vision that the holy Fathers called ‘vision seen by the *natural* eye’. However, this does not mean that the beholding of light is analogous to the psycho-physiological process of natural vision, for Divine Light is of a different nature. It is the light of the mind, the light of the spirit, the light of love, the light of life.

Physical light is the image of Divine Light in the natural world. We can only see the objects around us when there is light, and the eye discerns them badly if the light is poor, better if there is more light, and, finally, in the full light of the sun our vision attains a certain completeness. Likewise in the spiritual world no real vision is possible without Divine Light. Divine Light is constant in itself but man’s receptivity varies. Faith is light but in small measure. Hope is light but not yet perfect. The perfect light is love.

Uncreated Light like the sun lights up the spiritual world and makes visible the ways of the spirit which cannot otherwise be seen. Without this Light man can neither apprehend nor contemplate, still less perform the commandments of Christ, for he dwells in darkness. The Uncreated Light bears within it eternal life and the force of Divine love. Indeed, it is itself both Divine love and Divine wisdom, indivisibly one in eternity.

Unless the Divine Light has been contemplated with

vigour and intimation, real contemplation has not yet been attained. Whoever rashly anticipates this vision of the Uncreated Light, relying on his own intellect, will lose himself in contemplation of the mysteries of the Spirit and not only miss them but bar his own way to them. Unpurified by repentance, he will see only phantoms of truth, created by himself in an arrogant upsurge of logical argument, or presented to him by the Adversary in the form of demonic fantasy. Real spiritual contemplation is not the same thing as abstract intellectual contemplation. Its very nature is different. It is the light of life bestowed from on high by God's providence, and the organic path to it is not reason but repentance.

Divine Light is eternal life, the Kingdom of God, the uncreated energy of Divinity. It is not contained in created human nature and, being of a different kind, cannot be discovered through ascetic techniques. It comes exclusively as a gift of God's mercy.

I asked the Staretz, 'How can a man get to know these things by his own experience?' He declared that when God appears in great light there is no doubting that this is the Lord, the Almighty Creator Himself. But he who has caught but a faint glimmer of this Light and, instead of basing his faith on the testimony of the Fathers of the Church, interprets it according to his own experience cannot distinguish its heterogeneous nature, compared with his own soul. Only alternating influxes of grace and then abandonment will teach him how to tell the difference between Divine action and his own efforts.

When prayer for the first time progresses into a vision of Divine Light, what man then contemplates and lives is so novel, so unprecedented, that he can find no interpretation for it. He feels that the confines of his being have been so inexpressibly widened that the Light has translated him from death to life; but the magnitude of the experience leaves

him wondering and bewildered. It is only after repeated visitations that he can appreciate the divine gift he has received. At the time of the vision and after, the soul is filled with deep peace and the sweetness of the love of God. She aspires to nothing, neither to glory nor wealth, nor any earthly happiness, not even to life itself. All these things seem to her of no account. Her entire impulse is towards the living boundlessness of Christ in Whom there is neither beginning nor end, neither darkness nor death.

The Staretz preferred that form of contemplation in which the world is quite forgot – in which during imageless prayer man's spirit is introduced into the domain of limitless light, for a vision of this kind affords greater knowledge of the mysteries of the world to come. In this state the soul lives the full reality of her own participation in Divine life – experiences in very truth the advent of God of which the human tongue may not speak. When such a vision comes to an end, as it began, for reasons unknown to man and independent of his will, the soul gently returns to consciousness of the world around her, and her quiet joy in the love of God is tinged with a lingering sadness at the thought that once more she is about to behold the rough light of the sun.

Man is made in the image of God. What is it that constitutes this image in him? Is it his body? His threefold psychological structure? The answer is extremely complex. Some sort of refraction and reflection of God's image cannot be excluded from these aspects but the most essential is to be found in the *mode of being*. The created being, by the gift of God's good pleasure is made a partaker of uncreated, unoriginate Life. How is this possible? It is as inexplicable and unfathomable as the mystery of the world created '*ex nihilo*', and yet so it seemed good in the sight of the Heavenly Father. Created in the image and likeness of God, man is endowed with the capacity to apprehend deification – to receive the divine form of being, to become a god by grace.

Man receives deification. Which means that in the act of deification God is the active principle, man receives. Receiving, however, is not a passive state, and deification cannot occur without man's consent. Failing this, there is no possibility even of deification. This is the essential difference between the initial act of creation and its ultimate stage – the deification of the reasonable creature.

If the creation of the world is an inconceivably sublime mystery, the creation of eternal gods must be incomparably more august. If all the life of the world around us is an astounding miracle, the divine miracle when man is introduced into the world of Uncreated Light is immeasurably profounder and more forceful.

The fact even of existing fills man with wonder when he stops to think about it. I have met people who on entering the sphere of the intelligence appropriate to created human nature were astounded by its luminous splendour. But when man is introduced by the action of God into the world of Uncreated Light, there are no words to express his wonder, no words, no sighs to tell of his gratitude.

Godlike Impassibility

The uncreated Light proceeding from God makes the man who receives it share in the passionlessness of God. This is the ultimate objective of Christian asceticism.

What then is passionlessness? Philologically, the term implies negation. And its actual meaning – is not that negative, too? Does it not mean the putting off of life? No. Christian passionlessness is not the putting off of life but the putting on of a new, holy, eternal life in God. St. Paul says, 'Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.'ⁱ

In his desire to be free from passion the Orthodox ascetic reaches out towards live and authentic communion with God Whom he knows to be passionless.

ⁱ II Cor. v: 4.

God's passionlessness is not something dead, static. Indifference to man and to the world is not in the nature of God. God's passionlessness does not indicate something inert, an absence of pity and love. But these words immediately rouse in our minds empirically limited concepts which perplex us. Do not movements of pity, love and their like introduce a relativity into the existence of God? When we use these words are we not guilty of anthropomorphism?

God is all life, all love. God is light in which there is no darkness – neither the darkness of suffering in the sense of decay and death, nor the darkness of ignorance, of non-existence or evil; neither the darkness of unsurmounted inner imperfections, nor that of the failures, contradictions and breakdowns of existence. God is a living, dynamic God but the dynamics of Divine life are an endless, unoriginate fulness of being, which preclude any process of becoming.

God is passionless but not unconcerned with the life of the creature. God loves, pities, is compassionate, rejoices, but all this does not bring any decay, relativity or passion into His being. God provides with mathematical precision for His creation down to the smallest detail. As Father and Friend, He delivers us. He comforts the soul like a mother. He shares closely in the whole history of mankind, in the life of every man, but this does not introduce into the Divine Existence elements of uncertainty, change or development. God lives the whole tragedy of the world but this does not mean that there is any tragedy or strife in the bosom of God, arising from some lack or ignorance not yet overcome in Him.

God loves the world, operates in the world, enters into the world, becomes incarnate, suffers and even dies in the flesh without ceasing to be immutable in His supra-terrestrial being. He does so as passionlessly as He embraces in the simultaneity of His own eternity all the successiveness of created being. In God the static and dynamic are one; so that we cannot apply a single one of our concepts to His being.

In aspiring to godlike freedom from passion the monk sees this passionlessness, not as cold indifference, not as the putting off of an illusory existence; not as contemplation on the other side of good and evil, but as life in the Holy Spirit.

The passionless man is full of love, pity, concern; but all these proceed from God acting in him. Passionlessness may be defined as the acquiring of the Holy Spirit; as Christ living in us. Passionlessness is the light of new life inspiring in man new feelings and thoughts, a new light of eternal understanding.

The holy Fathers of the Church define passionlessness as the resurrection of the soul before the general resurrection of the dead. Abba Thalassius calls it 'attaining boundless boundlessness'.

The natural way to attain passionlessness is to begin with faith, understood, not as an intellectual postulate but as a sense of the living God. This faith begets fear of Divine judgment; fear begets repentance; repentance gives birth to prayer, confession and tears. As repentance, prayer and weeping increase and deepen, to start with there comes a partial freedom from passion and this begets hope, which gives a redoubled impetus to the ascetic effort, the prayer and tears. The sense of sin becomes more acute, more refined, and this gives rise to a dread which is then transformed into a repentance so deep that it brings down God's mercy upon the soul. The soul is now deemed worthy of the grace of the Holy Spirit and is filled with the light of Divine love.

Faith, too, is love, but love in small measure. Hope is love, but imperfect. Each time the soul ascends from a lesser to a greater degree of love she ineludibly experiences fear. Love when it comes drives out fear but fear which has been driven out by exiguous love is born again on the soul's transition to greater love and must again be overcome by love; and only perfect love, according to the witness of the

great Apostle of love, casteth out fear – that is, the fear in which there is torment.ⁱⁱ

There is another kind of fear of God, the awe which is free from torment, and full of joy and the breath of eternity. Of this awe which should never forsake man during his earthly life, the Staretz wrote,

‘We must live before God in fear and love. In fear, because He is the Lord; in fear lest we grieve Him by an evil thought; in love, because the Lord is love.’

The hesychasm of the Orthodox monk springs organically from deep repentance and his longing to keep the commandments of Christ. It is not the artificial application to spiritual life of Areopagitic theology. The theological teaching in the *Areopagita* does not gainsay the results of mental quiet, and in this sense approaches and even falls in with hesychasm. But there is this essential difference: the Orthodox ascetic does not arrive at mental quiet through the abstract philosophy of apophatic theology but by repentance and struggle against the ‘law of sin’ⁱⁱⁱ acting in human nature. It is when we endeavour to make the commandments of Christ the sole and integral law of our eternal being that the inaccessibility of God to human comprehension becomes manifest. Then does the spirit of man put off all images of the world, being lifted above the world. And this happens when a man realises with deep conviction that he is the worst of all creatures.

The Darkness of Divestiture

God, being ‘light in which there is no darkness at all’, always appears in light and as light. However, in performing prayer in the hesychast manner the soul of the ascetic meets with darkness of an especial nature, any description of which will also be contradictory and paradoxical – like that of most other aspects of Christian spiritual experience. This inconsis-

ⁱⁱ. cf. I John iv: 18.

ⁱⁱⁱ. Rom. vii: 23.

ency springs, on the one hand, from the nature of the experience and, on the other, from the point of view from which the spiritual occurrence is considered and defined.

It is this obscurity into which the ascetic's soul is plunged when, voluntarily, employing special ascetic methods, he strips himself of all notions and fancies concerning visible matters – when he 'stays' his mind and his imagination. This is why it can be termed the 'darkness of divestiture', and the prayer labelled 'methodical', since it follows the method especially established to this end.

If we would 'situate' the spiritual whereabouts of this darkness we could say that it is to be found on the outskirts of uncreated Light. But when hesychastic prayer is practised without due repentance, and without the prayer being wholly directed up to God, the soul, denuded of all imaginings may abide for a brief while in this 'darkness of divestiture' without having beheld God, for God *ipso facto* is not yet in this darkness.

Dwelling in the darkness of divestiture, the mind knows a peculiar delight and sense of peace. If at this point it turns in on itself it can perceive something akin to light, which, however, is not yet the uncreated light of Divinity but a natural attribute of the mind created in the image of God. Clearing the frontiers of time, such contemplation approaches the mind to knowledge of the intransitory, thereby possessing man of new but still abstract cognition. Woe to him who mistakes this wisdom for knowledge of the true God, and this contemplation for a communion in Divine being. Woe to him because the darkness of divestiture on the borders of true vision becomes an impenetrable pass and a stronger barrier between himself and God than the darkness due to the uprising of gross passion, or the darkness of obviously demonic instigations, or the darkness which results from loss of grace and abandonment by God. Woe to him, for he will have gone astray and fallen into delusion, since God is not in the darkness of divestiture. God reveals Himself in light and as light.

If on the other hand we take the point of view that man's rational knowledge and reflective consciousness are aspects of light, it is equally possible in some sense to speak of the 'darkness' of our vision of the Divine, because such vision cannot be explained in rational concepts and because God remains incomprehensible and unattainable to our minds. Still, to talk about the 'darkness' of divine vision is entirely a figure of speech, for God is Light in Whom there is no darkness at all. He always appears as light and when He does so He causes man to enter into the light of eternal Divine being.

Divine light consumes the passions in sinful man and at certain times man may therefore feel its presence as a consuming fire. Every Christian ascetic who aspires to live a pious life inevitably passes through this fire, and suffers burning.

The darkness of divestiture is not the sole 'domain' in which the uncreated light of Divinity appears. God can make Himself manifest to every man anywhere, even to those who persecute Him. True, when He appears He transports man out of this world, and so the consequence is nakedness or the divestiture of sensual image and logical concept but the sequence of these states is reversed. And the man to whom God has given a vision of His light will no longer be deluded by the natural light of his own mind. So then such error is possible only when man attains to the darkness of divestiture through some particular 'technique' before beholding the uncreated Light, and relies on himself instead of heeding the guidance of the Fathers.

When the light which has manifested itself forsakes the soul, she mourns for it and hungrily seeks it again by every means, both those she herself discovers and those indicated by the Fathers of the Church. The art of mental prayer is one of these means. Age-old experience has shown that recourse to this ascetic art is perfectly legitimate but its importance must neither be exaggerated nor denied, as some-

times foolishly happens. This skilled method is not obligatory for salvation. It is merely a help in cases where grace weakens in its action of uniting heart and mind. Man then resorts to his own exertions in seeking this union.

Normally, hesychastic prayer must have a positive content. In other words, it must spring from a feeling of repentance and an *élan* towards God. Otherwise, only negative ascetic action remains which because of its negativity cannot constitute an end in itself. It is only a stage in our empirically-given state of sin and bondage to the passions – when sin acting in us has become the law of our earthly being.

And here I would repeat what has already been said – that Orthodox hesychasm is not some artificial application to life of ‘Areopagitic Apophatic’ theology. Not so. It is born of profound repentance. As the Staretz said, its roots lie in Christ’s commandment, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind’.^{iv} Apophatic ascetic divestiture is prompted by the search for the living God, ‘Whom the soul knows’; by search for freedom of the mind from all worldly images, in order to stand before God in fulness of love, face to Face, with a pure mind in godly prayer. This means, first and foremost, prayer, not rational analysing.

The Staretz loved the *silence* of the intellect and constantly resorted to it. It came to him easily because his mental prayer was never interrupted after the Mother of God accorded him this gift.

Complete freedom from all sensitive excitements provides the best background for hesychastic prayer. More important still are darkness and quiet. Like practically all hesychasts the Staretz was obliged to seek out such an ambience. At this point let us look at some of the *minutiae* of his life. While he was still comparatively young he obtained permission from the Abbot to go to Old Russikon to live in solitude. There he built himself a little ‘hut’ not far from the Community

^{iv}. Luke x: 27.

buildings (about five minutes' walk to the south-east – it was there that Father Stratonikos went to see him). He only lived a short time at Old Russikon before being transferred back to the Monastery and appointed steward. There he would shut himself up in his cell, put his alarm-clock away in the bottom of the cupboard so as not to hear its ticking, and sometimes pull his woollen cowl down over his eyes and ears. When he started to run the Monastery store, which was situated outside the Monastery walls, he arranged a quiet corner of the spacious premises where he could pray. There he passed the nights, going to the Monastery in the morning when the gates were opened for Matins. He caught even worse colds in the Monastery store and suffered much from rheumatism. During the last years of his life illness kept him in his cell in the Monastery which he was able to heat properly. His last cell was on the same floor as the Abbot's. The nights he would quite often spend in another little cell where he kept firewood. This was on the same floor, in a row of other small cells used for keeping firewood when the number of monks shrank. The landing was a deserted dead-end with extraordinarily thick stone walls. Here in this stone retreat he knew even greater solitude and complete quiet and obscurity.

For the superficial observer, the Staretz continued to the end of his days to be an 'ordinary' man. He lived like all good monks in general, fulfilling his tasks of obedience, abstinent, observing the monastery rules and traditions, taking communion twice a week – three times during Lent and other fasts. His work in the store-house was not difficult – for a man of his physical strength it was even easy, requiring comparatively little time although it did demand his presence during the daylight hours. To the end he continued tranquil and good-tempered. There were never any outbursts, no ugliness, external or internal. Like a really experienced ascetic he showed nothing outwardly, standing before the Father in secret, as the Lord commanded. To the end he stayed remote

from mundane interests and indifferent to the things of this world. But deep in his heart the fire of Christ-like love burned without cease.

IX

Grace and Consequent Dogmatic Consciousness

The word *grace* recurs constantly in the Staretz' writings. In order to understand the term better, let us consider what the word suggests to the Orthodox monk. The Russian term for grace – *blagodat'* – is a compound of the words meaning *good* or *goodness* and *given*. It expresses in part the theological idea of grace which is God's good gift, or a gift of God's goodness – the uncreated supra-human and meta-cosmic energy of Divinity.

Man is created in the image of God the Creator. His created being contains no uncreated elements. As created image of God he cannot partake in the Divine essence but he is endowed with the faculty of entering into communion with uncreated Divinity through communion in God's grace. And though man by nature is alien to the Divine essence, through grace he participates in Divine life.

Since grace is God's uncreated energy, the Orthodox understand it as *Divinity*. When it is God's good pleasure to unite with the human being, man perceives within himself the action of a Divine force which transfigures him and makes him no longer just potentially godlike – in the image of God – but actually godlike in likeness of being. The grace that is Divinity hallows man, divinizes him, makes him into a god.

The commandment of Christ is, as I have said before, not an ethical standard but in itself eternal divine life. Natural man does not possess this life in his own created being and

so cannot by his own efforts do God's will and live according to God's commandment. But it is in his nature to aspire towards God and reach out towards the blessings of eternal life. But these aspirations would have had no chance of fulfilment had not grace, the Divine energy, in itself an object of man's search since it is eternal divine life, come to meet man half-way.

In his own experience the Christian ascetic is convinced by the action of grace that grace can only be of divine origin. His experience convinces him that this force does not exist in man's own nature. He goes on to feel sure that not only does man seek God but that God seeks man and to an incomparably greater extent. God constantly pursues man, and so soon as man manifests his own aspiration towards good and to putting good into actual practice, grace is already on the threshold. Yet the action or reaction of grace does not depend on man's will. Grace comes and goes according to the will of God Whose freedom is absolute and Who is subject to no compulsion. Man, no matter what he does, must abide outside real life, outside the Divine light and in 'outer darkness', if God's good pleasure does not will otherwise.

Since the Orthodox monk knows this by experience, the whole object of his life lies in acquiring the grace of the Holy Spirit. This was the capital factor in Staretz Silouan's own existence, and it expressed itself in his perpetual striving for grace and constant colloquies about how we can acquire it and why we lose it.

The history of the Church together with personal contact with many ascetics has led me to the conclusion that the experience of grace in those who have been granted visitations and visions is only assimilated deeply after years of ascetic endeavour; grace then taking the form of spiritual knowledge that I should prefer to define as 'dogmatic consciousness' (but not in the academic sense of the term).

The historical experience of the Church, in which I include

the Apostles and the holy Fathers both ancient and modern, makes it possible to calculate this period of assimilation as lasting at least fifteen years. Thus St Paul's first Epistle (to the Thessalonians) was written some fifteen years after the Lord had appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Often the period lasts twenty, twenty-five, even thirty or more years. The Evangelists and other Apostles wrote their testimonies and epistles long after the Lord's Ascension. Most of the holy Fathers acquainted the world with their visions and experiences only when their ascetic course was nearing its close. More than thirty years elapsed before the Staretz set down in writing, with final and mature dogmatic consciousness, his own experience. The assimilation of grace is a lengthy process.

The dogmatic consciousness I have here in mind is the fruit of spiritual experience, independent of the logical brain's activity. The writings in which the Saints reported their experience were not cast in the form of scholastic dissertations. They were revelations of the soul. Discourse on God and on life in God comes about simply, without cogitation, born spontaneously in the soul.

Dogmatic consciousness where asceticism is concerned is not a rational analysis of an inward experience – it is not 'psychoanalysis'. Ascetics avoid this rational speculation because it not only weakens the intensity of their contemplation of the Light but, indeed, interrupts it, with the result that the soul sinks into darkness, left as she is with a merely abstract rational knowledge devoid of all vitality.

What is the use of reasoning about the nature of grace if one does not experience its action in oneself? What is the use of declaiming about the light of Tabor if one does not dwell in it existentially? Is there any sense in splitting theological hairs over the nature of the Trinity if a man has not within himself the holy strength of the Father, the gentle love of the Son, the uncreated light of the Holy Ghost?

Dogmatic knowledge, understood as spiritual knowledge, is a gift of God, like all forms of real life in God, granted

by God, and only possible through His coming. This knowledge has by no means always been expressed in speech or in writing. The soul does not aspire to expound her experience in rational concepts when God's grace descends on her. She needs no logical interpretations then, because she knows with a knowledge that cannot be demonstrated but which equally requires no proof that she lives through the true God. And were there strength left in her, she would aspire to greater fulness of Divine life, and when the action of God is beyond her strength, she swoons in blessed silence.

It is impossible to clothe spiritual experience in flawless verbal form. The human tongue has no words with which duly to express the life of the spirit – what is logically incomprehensible and inexpressible must be comprehended existentially. God is made known by faith and living communion, whereas human speech with all its relativity and fluidity opens the way to endless misunderstandings and objections.

We may be sure that none of the Saints would have sought language in which to express their spiritual experiences. They would have dwelt in silence for evermore – silence, the 'mystery of the world to come' – had they not been faced with the task of teaching their fellows; had not love roused the hope that someone – 'if only a single soul', as the Staretz wrote – might hear the word and, repenting, be saved.

The foundations of sure dogmatic cognizance are laid when man first experiences grace; and if this aspect of the spiritual life – one and undivided – is not immediately apparent, it is not because God's gift is flawed but because a lengthy interior process is required for its assimilation.

Man dwells in blessed wonder as he contemplates for the first time the uncreated Divine light; as he is led for the first time into the world of eternal being, because his vision is so unlike, so incomparable with the world of things around him. He cannot find words to express what he has seen. He

will be speechless or else say something almost absurd. Unless he is called upon to preach the good tidings, he will hide what he has heard in his heart; and until he has assimilated the first gift of Divine grace, however great it may be, he is apt not only to waver again but even to fall. St. Peter is an example of this. He stood in blessed wonder on Mount Tabor but later denied the Lord at the time of His sufferings, yet many years after in his Epistle referred to his vision on Tabor as evidence of truth.

Some people take longer than others to assimilate grace. In general, the process is as follows: the initial experience of Divine visitation strikes man to the core and draws his whole being into the inner life of prayer and struggle against the passions. His heart is alive with feeling during this initial stage which abounds in such powerful experiences that the entire mind is drawn to take part in them. The subsequent period – the loss of grace – plunges him into great grief and a frenzied search for the cause of his loss, and the way in which it can be remedied. It is only after long years of these alternating spiritual states, after much wrestling against the passions, reading of the Scriptures and the works of the holy Fathers, and discussions with spiritual guides and other ascetics, that man discovers in himself the light of the knowledge of the ways of the spirit, which comes secretly and unobserved.ⁱ This knowledge, which is called dogmatic consciousness, is the deep-set life of the spirit, having nothing to do with abstract gnosis.

God is neither envious, selfish nor ambitious. Humbly and patiently He pursues all men on all life's paths, and each of us can therefore come to know God to some degree, not only in but outside the Church, though perfect knowledge of God is impossible apart from Christ or outside Christ.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ cf. Luke xvii:20.

ⁱⁱ cf. Matt. xi:27.

Apart from Christ no spiritual (mystic) experience will lead to knowledge of the Divine Being as One Objectivity, absolute and inconceivable, in Three Persons, absolute and inconceivable – to knowledge of the Trinity, consubstantial and indivisible. This revelation is given in Christ alone. In Him it becomes light eternal pouring itself out on all the manifestations of human existence.

It is clear from the Staretz' writings that without any inconsistency he lived the One God in Three Persons. In his prayers he applied the same names – Father, Lord, Master, King, Creator, Saviour, and so on – to each separate Person of the Holy Trinity, as also to the Three in One.

The Staretz testified categorically that the Divinity of Jesus Christ is made known in the Holy Spirit. The knowledge of Christ's Divinity thus acquired through spiritual experience enables man to comprehend in Christ the unfused union of two natures and two wills. The uncreated nature of Divine Light and the other dogmas of our faith are likewise made known through inner experience in the Holy Spirit. But here it must be noted that the dogmatic consciousness that comes from experience of grace differs essentially from a dogmatic knowledge which outwardly resembles it but is the product of 'faith in things heard', of academic study or a philosophical conviction in the form of a series of ideal abstract conceptions.

It is one thing to believe in God, and another to know God, as the Staretz said.

Ideal – abstract – conceptions may correspond to the facts of existence but, separated from positive experience of grace, they are not that knowledge of God which is actual life eternal.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet they, too, are precious for at any moment they may afford help to a man in his spiritual life.

If an intellectual theologian finds no treasure of theological thought or dogmatic knowledge in the Staretz' writings, it

ⁱⁱⁱ. cf. John xvii:3.

will be because his spirituality belongs on another plane of religious life.

The rationalist-theologian is concerned with a multitude of problems whose solution he seeks through philosophical speculation. His actual religious experience is not very wide. It proceeds mainly from the rational sphere of his being, not from a lively communion with God. He counts his scientific erudition and intellectual experience as spiritual riches, rating them so highly that all other knowledge takes second place.

For the really spiritual man seeking a lively communion with the living God, the ingenuousness of the rationalist leaps to the eye. He cannot understand how an intelligent man can be content with his own conjectures and abstract interpretations. Scholars, for instance, have wrestled down the centuries trying to relate grace and the freedom of man. They forget, as it were, that there is another route to the solution of these problems – the way of existential knowledge of the reciprocity of Divine grace and human freedom. This was the road the Staretz took. It is the Church's route in general. The Church is strong and rich, not by her secular erudition but, above all, in her actual possession of the gifts of grace. The Church lives by the Holy Spirit, breathes through Him, and through the very fact of this communion with Him knows how He operates, knows, too, how and within what limits human freedom functions.

The reciprocal action of grace and freedom is infinitely diverse. It springs, on the one hand, from the measure or degree or strength of grace. On the other, it lies in the spiritual state of each separate individual. The Fathers of the Church and the Staretz declare that when the Lord enters man's soul, when the Divine Light embraces the *whole* man, when the whole man is in God, he somehow, as it were, loses his freedom. His freedom then is manifest only in so far as he commits himself totally to God and no longer operates himself, adopting solely what God bestows. In that

state man 'asks nothing'.^{iv} In other words, all queries – everything 'problematical' – cease to exist.

In saying this, far be it from me to repudiate the legitimacy and naturalness of the soul's blind groping. I am simply speaking of two different approaches. Whereas one man will want and be content with an answer on the rational plane, another will look for it in the form of actual being. To satisfy the exigencies of his mind the rationalist devises the most complex of theological-philosophical systems. He will make colossal efforts, if not to prove dialectically, then at least to develop and display matters as they seem to him. Often he will devote all his strength, his rich talents, his whole life to this. But, oddly enough, he does not perceive that such research is unfounded. Could one really arrive at the solution to the problems of eternal life along these lines? And if it were possible – does abstract knowledge mean the same thing as genuine life? Could such a naïve solution satisfy one's spirit?

From his early years Blessed Staretz Silouan was conscious of the need for authentic being. He craved for the reality which in itself bears irrefutable witness to our spirit of eternal life – witness as incontestable as our consciousness of our own existence on this earth.

It was a great moment in the history of human thought and spiritual experience when Descartes pronounced the words, '*Cogito, ergo sum*' ('I think, therefore I am'). Another philosopher, one of our day, understood life rather differently, putting it, 'I love, therefore I am, for I esteem love a more profound motive for searching out the reality of our existence.' Others might say, 'I eat, I walk, therefore I am' – meaning, 'Everything I do, everything I manifest, is proof of my existence.'

All these formulae spring from a rational reaction to the question, 'Do I exist?'. But independently even of such a

^{iv} cf. John xvi:23.

reflection, in the sphere of irrational (self-) consciousness every man recognises that he exists.

Thus there are spiritual states where man has direct knowledge of his immortality, knows for certain that he is a participant in eternal life; when the Holy Spirit, as the Staretz expresses it, bears witness to the soul of her salvation. Trying to find the solution to the problems before us is, indeed, work for the wise man. It is the way of life, the way followed by the Church of Christ. Authentic knowledge of Divine being constitutes the wealth of the Church. Blessed Staretz Silouan was rich precisely in this experience of eternal being bestowed on him by the Holy Spirit and in which he put his trust.

‘O Holy Spirit,’ the Staretz prayed, ‘Thou hast revealed to me a mystery that passeth all understanding.’

And had we asked him to disclose to us this mystery that the Holy Spirit had made known to him, his reply would not have been the one we sought. He would say,

‘The Holy Spirit invisibly gives the soul knowledge . . . He has suffered me to come to know the Lord my Creator. He has suffered me to know how immeasurably the Lord loves us . . . It is impossible to explain this.’

So poor was the Staretz’ dialectic. Yet it would be wrong to put this down to want of education. Someone with exceptional intellectual gifts and capable of rational thought would have been equally speechless had he touched upon that state of being about which the Staretz spoke. There can be no ‘wealth’ of thought and theological concepts here. Human words have not the potentiality to express that life to which we are called, the life which God gives. Even the Lord Himself evaded verbal description of it but declared, ‘When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth . . . And in that day, ye shall ask me nothing’.^v

^v. John xvi:13, 23.

X

Spiritual Trials

Man does not always find it easy with God. In the generally much prolonged periods when grace abandons the soul, God may appear a merciless tyrant. When all his efforts – often pushed to extreme limits – fail to obtain Divine mercy, man suffers so acutely that, were it possible, he would renounce existence in any form.

What, then, is the nature of this suffering? Not an easy question to answer.

Once having cognized God, having experienced life in the light radiating from the Divine Countenance, the soul no longer finds peace or satisfaction in any reality of this world, while at the same time she is surrounded by everything except God. Everything she recognises as evil, as darkness, as demonic action, tosses her about. Sometimes the torture inflicted by the passions is so intense that it seems as if God had abandoned man and now paid no heed to his appeals. Like the most helpless creature he hangs suspended over the frightful abyss, and cries to God for help but all his cries remain unheeded. God seems indifferent to all his sufferings. The soul is aware that she had turned away from God's love, and her iniquity and betrayal torture her. Nevertheless, she implores Him to have pity on her. But in vain. God merely indicts the soul and she is weary of such accusations. She recognises the justice of the divine judgment but that by no means lessens her sufferings. It is not her imagination – she really is plunged into the shadow of death, and not finding by her side the God Whom she invokes day and night she suffers intolerably.

One asks oneself – where is the sense in all this?

During the times of trial the soul cannot accept it as a sign of Divine mercy or of God's confidence in her, as His desire to associate man with holiness and fulness of being in Himself. The soul knows only one thing – that God has abandoned her after having manifest His Light, thereby vastly magnifying her misery. And when, at the end of her strength, she does not behold God leaning mercifully towards her, such thoughts and sentiments assault her concerning which it is better to remain silent. The soul descends into hell but not like those who do not know the Divine Spirit, who do not possess the light of true knowledge of God and so are blind. No – she descends into hell capable of discerning the nature of the darkness she beholds.

This only happens to those who, having known Divine grace, have then lost it. The seed of Divine love which the soul bears in her depths then engenders repentance so powerful, so total, as to surpass the measure of ordinary religious consciousness. Shedding abundant tears, man turns to God *with his whole being*, with his whole strength, and so learns true prayer, which detaches him from this world, introducing him into another world where he hears words which no human language can express – ineffable words, since once translated into current concepts he who hears them can only see and hear what he knows from his own experience. When the soul has gone through this whole gamut of harsh testing she perceives clearly in herself that there is no place in the world, no tribulation, no joy, no force, no creature that could separate her from the love of God.ⁱ The shades of night can no longer swallow up the light of this life.

Man does not always find it easy with God. Similarly, it is not always easy to live with a saint. Many imagine naïvely that contact with saints must be pleasant and full of joy.

ⁱ cf. Rom. viii:35.

They complain that they are surrounded by sinners, and dream of encountering a saint. From the odd encounter which may have filled the downcast soul with the light of hope and renewed strength, they hasten to conclude that living among saints always has the same exhilarating effect on the soul. Not so. No saint could release us from the obligation to struggle against the sin in us. He can assist by his prayers, help with a word of counsel, strengthen by his example, but he cannot release us from the harsh necessity for personal struggle and sacrifice. And when a saint exhorts and summons us to live according to the commandments of Christ, he may seem 'hard'. Was it not said – and to this day is it not said – of Christ Himself, that His 'is an hard saying; who can hear it?'ⁱⁱ. So likewise when the saints demand that we keep the commandments in all their purity, we find it beyond our strength and 'hard'.

Staretz Silouan was always gentle, indulgent and good but he never deviated from what God had taught him. His attitude was simple and plain – 'The Lord feels pity for all men . . . He so loved man that He took upon Himself the burden of the whole world . . . And from us – He would that we love our brethren.' Listening to the Staretz, one knew with one's whole soul that he was speaking truth. But to follow him is beyond us. And many have abandoned him. The spiritual fragrance that emanated from him generated profound shame for oneself and a sense of one's own stench and vileness. If you moaned against people who affronted you, he would understand how you felt, and sympathise with you, but not share your wrath. If you thought to return evil for evil, he would be distressed over you. If you considered it detrimental to repay the bad man with good, he could not understand how you, who called yourself a Christian, could think that something done in accordance with Christ's commandment might in any way be damaging.

ⁱⁱ. John vi:60.

For him Christ's commandments were the law of absolute perfection and the unique way to subjugate the evil in the world and lead to eternal light. Keeping the commandments can only be profitable – profitable alike for him who obeys and the one on the receiving end. No, there can be no circumstances in which following Christ's commandments could be harmful, if one envisages harm, not from a temporal angle but on the plane of eternal being, for Christ's commandment is the expression of absolute good.

A hieromonk once remarked to the Staretz that to act as he said would be to the enemy's advantage, and so evil would triumph. The Staretz was silent for a moment because his interlocutor was incapable of understanding what he might say but later on he remarked to another monk, 'Could the spirit of Christ wish ill on anyone? Is that what God has called us to?'

In the man dominated by the passions the malice in his conscience is both extreme and subtle. In the spiritual life the man possessed by passion often passes it off as a disinterested search for truth and profit – sometimes even as combat for the glory of God. In the name of Christ Who gave Himself up to death for the sake of His enemies, people are sometimes ready to shed blood – though not their own blood but that of their 'brother-enemy'. It has been so all down the centuries but the Staretz' life coincided with a moment in history when this perversion attained exceptional force.

'Can this be the way of Christ?' he would remark sadly.

The Staretz' message is a 'hard' one. Who can hear it? To live accordingly is to deliver oneself over to martyrdom, not only in the primary sense of the word but martyrdom in everyday life.

I cannot at the moment remember where it is that we are told about a pious man who all his life pleaded with God to accord him a martyr's death, and when the hour came for his peaceful end, he said sadly, 'My prayer has not been

heard'. But scarcely had he uttered the words when he was apprised inside himself that his whole life had been a martyrdom and was accepted as martyrdom.

The Staretz said that the grace he had received at the outset was 'comparable with the grace of martyrs', so that he even thought that perhaps the Lord was reserving a martyr's death for him: but as the pious man he was, he died peacefully. He was, to the highest degree, sober in all things. He did not give himself over to day-dreaming about perfection but, having known Christ's perfect love he spent his whole life in an intense effort to acquire it. More than anyone else he knew that 'the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak'ⁱⁱⁱ – which is why he remarked that people were to be met with who wanted to suffer for Christ but without grace in the body, too, one might not be able to bear martyrdom. This is why we should not audaciously engage in such asceticism but if the Lord summons us to do so, we must pray for His help, and He will help us.

The Staretz did not seek martyrdom, even though he knew 'the grace of martyrs'. Nevertheless, his life was a veritable martyrdom – one could even say, worse than martyrdom. Sometimes a martyr will pay with his life for a brief period of confessing his faith. But to live long years of ascetic life, long years of praying for the world, as he did – 'to pray for people is to shed blood' – is greater than simple martyrdom.

The way of the Christian always means martyrdom. He who rightly follows it is reluctant to preach it. His soul is full of the desire to see his brother a communicant in eternal light but the suffering he would bear alone. And so before and above all else the Christian devotes himself to prayer for the world.

Within the boundaries of earthly life, in this sphere set aside by God for the manifestation of the possibilities, not just

ⁱⁱⁱ. Matt. xxvi:41.

positive but negative likewise, of freedom, no one and nothing can altogether arrest the manifestation of evil. The prayer of love, however, is powerful enough to modify the course of events and diminish the scale of evil.

'The life is the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.'^{iv} The darkness of non-being cannot black out the light of life. All the good that proceeds from God and returns to God is *indestructible*. Prayer is one of the highest forms of ontological good, indestructible, eternal. It is 'that good part, which shall not be taken away'.^v

In the quest after salvation, for himself and his brethren, the ascetic concentrates on his 'inner man', becomes aware in himself of the powerfulness of the 'law of sin'.^{vi} Seeing how sin slays him^{vii} in spite of all his exertions to do good, he not seldom reaches the limits of despair, and in this painful state takes to prayer.

I remember one memorable visit. A monk, a hermit, came to see us. He was about seventy years of age. He lived at a deserted spot between the Monastery and the hermitage, in a ravine by a stream in a wood. His face, ravaged, all wrinkles, looked grey and long unwashed; the dark-grey hair of his head and beard looked dirty, his greyish-blue eyes were sunk deep in their sockets. We had a long talk with him, and this is what he told us:

'It is many years now that my soul suffers when I think of us monks. We have renounced the world, left our parents and our Motherland, given up everything that usually constitutes life for people. We have pronounced our vows before God, the holy angels and our brethren to live according to Christ's law. We have renounced our own will, and in effect lead a martyr's life, and still we make no progress towards

^{iv}. John i:4-5.

^v. Luke x:42.

^{vi}. Rom. vii:23.

^{vii}. cf. Rom. vii:11.

goodness. Will many of us be saved? I shall be the first to perish. I see others, too, who are slaves to their passions. And when I meet people of the world, I see that they live in profound ignorance, listless and unrepentant. And thus, little by little, without even noticing, I was drawn to pray for the world. The thought distressed me that if we, monks who have renounced the world, do not find salvation, what must it be like in the world? My sorrow gradually increased and I started weeping tears of despair. And now, last year when I was in such despair, tired of weeping, lying face down on the floor, the Lord appeared to me and asked, 'Why weepest thou?' I was silent. 'Dost thou not know that it is I Who will judge the world?' I still keep silent. The Lord says, 'I will have mercy on every man who, if only once in his life, has called upon God' . . . The thought crossed my mind, 'So what is the use of us tormenting ourselves day after day?' To which the Lord replied, 'Those who suffer because of My commandment will be My friends in the Kingdom of Heaven: the others I will merely have mercy upon.' With this the Lord retired.

This happened when he was awake. He went on to tell us of two visions that had come when he was in a light sleep after sorrowful prayer for the world.

I am not going to mention the name of this monk because he is still alive. Nor will I attempt to appraise his vision. I listened impassively, not reacting to his story, in accordance with the strict rule for monks on Mt. Athos – to be especially guarded where visions are concerned. Perhaps it was this dry caution or some stupidity on my part that alienated the old monk – in any case, he never came again. True, the pretentious idea had occurred to me – to probe him further. Perhaps he felt hurt? I do not know.

During my time on the Holy Mountain I met nine monks who gladly prayed for the world, shedding tears as they

prayed. On one occasion I heard this discussion between two of them. The first said,

‘I cannot understand why the Lord does not grant peace to the world even if only a single person implored Him to do so.’

To which the other replied,

‘And how could there be complete peace in the world if but a single malicious man remained?’

But let us return to our subject.

God is not always easy for man.

I repeat myself but our theme makes repetition inevitable. The ascetic’s range of thought is neither rich nor varied. He is concerned with a sphere of being not easily assimilated. Centuries go by and the same experience recurs almost identically. Yet few people recognise the pattern of Christian progress, and they lose their way. The Lord said, ‘Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.’^{viii.}

Let us return once more to the subject that engaged Staretz Silouan and Father Stratonikos in long discussions. The spiritual way for the Christian broadly speaking presents itself like this: At the outset man is drawn to God by the gift of grace; and once attracted, a prolonged period of testing sets in. His freedom as a man and his trust in God are put to the test – sometimes ‘harshly’. At the initial stage of his conversion his prayers, urgent or not so urgent, are miraculously granted almost before they are uttered. But when the time of trial starts, everything alters. It seems as if heaven had closed up and become deaf to all our prayers. For the fervent Christian everything in life gets to be difficult. There is a change in people’s attitude towards him – he is no longer respected. What is willingly forgiven others is held against him. His resistance to physical ills is lowered. Nature, circumstances, people – all turn against him. He finds no outlet

^{viii.} Matt. vii:14.

for his natural talents, though they are no less valuable than other people's. On top of all this he has to endure assaults from the demonic powers. And finally – the most painful and unbearable of torments – God deserts him. His suffering is complete – he is stricken on every level of his being.

Does God abandon men? Surely this is not possible? Yet instead of a sense of God's proximity the soul now feels that He is infinitely, inaccessibly far away, farther than the stellar worlds, and all appeals to Him are lost in space. Inside herself the soul doubles her invocations but sees neither help nor even that they are noticed. Everything is painful. It seems that nothing can be achieved without disproportionate effort, strenuous beyond human strength. Life becomes a Calvary and there is a feeling that God's curse and wrath have descended on the soul. But later, when this ordeal is over, he will realise how carefully the ineffably wondrous Divine providence has preserved him on his every path.

Millenary experience from generation to generation down the ages testifies that when God sees the ascetic's fidelity to Him – as He remarked that of Job – He conducts him into abysses and up to heights inaccessible to any other man. The more unshakeable the ascetic's loyalty and trust in God, the greater will be the measure of his testing and the more complete his experience, which may reach the ultimate limits attainable by man.

So long as pride is deeply rooted in him, man is subject to particularly painful, hellish despair, that distorts his every notion of God and the ways of His providence. The proud soul, plunged in the torments and shades of hell, sees God as the cause of her sufferings and considers Him immeasurably cruel. Deprived of true life in God, she sees everything through the spectrum of her own crippled state, and begins to detest both her own life and, in general, everything that exists in the world. Outside the Divine light, in her despair she begins to consider even the existence of God Himself as

hopeless absurdity. And so her estrangement from God and her detestation of everything that exists grows and grows.

People of faith escape this despair, this hatred, because it is through faith that man is saved; through faith in the love and compassion of God, faith in His word, faith in the witness of the Fathers of the Church. Probably the majority of devout Christians in the course of their lives have not experienced their own resurrection but they believe in it and their faith preserves them. The Staretz often spoke of this faith, quoting the Lord's words, 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.'^{ix} The hour will come when this faith will lead man out of the cramped darkness of bondage into the vast expanse of true, imperishable life, the splendour of which is quite incomparable with our usual ideas of splendour and beauty.

The devil treats in a different manner those who yield to him and those who resist. The suffering occasioned by the despair that arises out of pride differs from that of the pious soul when God allows Satan to wage war against her. The latter form of temptation is extremely painful and only rarely permitted.

When man for the first time deliberately abandoned by God senses the approach of Satan, his whole being, soul and body, suffers immense distress and terror not to be compared with the fear caused by the approach of criminals or murderers, for it is the black night of eternal damnation. The soul then knows exactly *what* the devil is, appreciates the force of his cruelty, and shocked by the colossal evil confronting her shrinks into herself. So undone by the horror, the despair and alarm that have taken possession of her, she has no strength left for prayer. She has no sense of God as her shield, and the enemy says to her, 'You are in my power . . . Put not your trust in God, forget Him. He cannot be inclined to mercy.' At such moments the soul, unwilling

^{ix} John xx:29.

to give in to the devil, either immobilises herself, still, silent, in the thought of God, or else, in better cases, finds in herself the strength to invoke the Divine name. It is only later on that she will realise with what solicitude God inclined unto her in the hour of combat.

From the Staretz' writings we shall see that twice he had to wage this sort of struggle against Satan. The first time he was saved by repeating the Jesus Prayer – before he had finished, the Lord appeared to him. On the second occasion, more practised and courageous, he found the strength to sit down and turn towards God and pray. Then it was that he heard in response the strange words, 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not'.

Then it was that he knew how to arm himself against the devil, at whose every approach the soul must turn on herself all the fire of self-hatred and, like her worst enemy, condemn herself to eternal torment, repeating all the time, 'But God is holy, true and blessed through all ages'.

Armed with this weapon, the soul rids herself of all fear and becomes impervious to all evil. At the enemy's every attack she casts herself wrathfully into the abyss of eternal darkness, judging herself deserving of such punishment, and the enemy then retires, unable to bear the violence of the fire blazing in the soul, and the soul, rid of him, can turn to God and pray with a pure spirit.

'The enemy fell through pride.' Pride is the source of sin, comprising every aspect that evil can assume – conceit, ambition, indifference, cruelty, disregard of the suffering of others; day-dreaming, over-fantasising, a demented expression in the eye, in every other feature; gloom, melancholy, despair, animosity; envy, an inferiority complex, carnal desires; wearisome psychological disturbance, rebellious feelings, fear of death or, on the contrary, wanting to put an end to life; and, lastly and not seldom, utter madness.

These are the indications of demonic spirituality. But until they show up clearly, they pass unnoticed for many.

It does not need all these symptoms to denote someone who has let himself be seduced by satanic thoughts or visions or revelations. In some people megalomania predominates, or ambition. With others, nostalgia, despair, hidden anxiety. In still others, it is envy, gloom, hatred. With many it is the desires of the flesh. But they all suffer from unbridled imagination and pride – masked, maybe, by an air of false humility.

When a man lets himself be seduced by the enemy and sets out to follow him, not realising *what* the enemy is, he does not appreciate the harshness of the combat, and so suffers, not realising that the enemy is seducing him from the light of true life into his own benighted habitat. Such suffering bears the imprint of spiritual blindness. In some cases the enemy will convey an uneasy delight at the thought of illusory grandeur. In others he provokes acute pain in the soul, inciting her against God, and then the soul, not perceiving the real cause of her agony, turns against God in hatred.

A pious soul, however, that has come to know the love of God, in the straight fight against the enemy suffers from the immensely baleful power for evil that the devil directs against her. She is well aware that this force could utterly destroy her.

In the first instance, the soul generally struggles for a long time without finding the issue that will lead her to God. In the second case, God appears to man in great light so soon as the time of testing is over, the duration and intensity of which is measured by God. For some it lasts several minutes, with others, an hour or more. And for one ascetic it went on for three days. The duration may depend, for the one part, on the intensity of the struggle and, on the other, the degree of the soul's endurance, for not all souls are equally strong.

There is no more powerful temptation than this battle against Satan. The tribulation exceeds every other possible calamity. Yet there is a still worse form of suffering – the suffering of the soul wounded to her very depths with love for God and yet not attaining Him Whom she seeks.

How incomprehensible the manner in which God treats the soul! After generating ardent love in her, in a mysterious manner He steals away, and when the soul can no longer bear being abandoned, then He softly returns with His ineffable consolation. At times the torment of feeling abandoned by God is worse than all the torments of hell but it differs in that it has within itself life-giving Divine strength capable of transforming affliction into the sweet blessedness of the love of God.

So long as he is burdened by the flesh man cannot continue steady and unyielding. Now and again the soul of the ascetic engaged in pure prayer touches upon genuine eternal life, her ultimate and unique aim, but when this prayer comes to an end the soul sinks to a state of being either just faintly aware of God or even sensually affected by the world. The body is impervious to light and the feeling of the presence of God loses its intensity.

Many people are so obsessed by their sensory perceptions as practically to know no others, and then they become this 'flesh' themselves, turning their backs on the law of God. But for an ascetic to fall from pure prayer into the opacity of a sensual approach to the world means that he is distancing himself from the Lord. The Apostle Paul says, 'Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord . . . We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.'^{*} Only by uninterrupted effort can the ascetic preserve himself from the humiliation to which the flesh constantly drags him down. And the more frequently his spiritual moods recur and the longer they last,

^{*} II Cor. v:6, 8.

the more painful it is for him when he falls back to a sensual approach to the world.

When an ascetic, moved by the spirit of Divine love, prays with profound weeping for the world, and reaches the highest state possible for him at that moment, he feels peace of spirit due to his nearness to God. But when his prayer comes to an end, the peace lasts a certain while, sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, after which the agitation starts up again. These alternating states lead to different results. At a certain stage on their spiritual path some ascetics may attain to a measure of prayer that plunges their soul into fear and trembling, after which they gradually retreat and allow their prayer to weaken. Other, more valiant souls, on the contrary, unwearingly continue to develop, seeking ever more fulness of prayer. And so it goes on until their desire – their *sine qua non* even – not to spare themselves, to detest and destroy their own life, is implanted deep in their being. But even this, as we see in the Staretz' writings, is still not the supreme love that the Lord communicates to His servants, for the sweetness of which man can lightly bear any suffering, even death itself.

Blessed Staretz Silouan knew without the faintest shadow of doubt that the love taught him by the Holy Spirit is TRUTH whose intrinsic authenticity is beyond question. He had realised this at the time the Lord appeared to him. He would say that when the Lord manifests Himself to the soul, it is impossible for the soul not to recognise in Him her Creator and God. Through the action of the Holy Spirit it was given to the Staretz to contemplate the perfect holiness of God, and with his whole heart, his whole being, he strove to be joined with, to acquire this sanctity.

It is impossible for one who follows this path to indulge in abstract rational cogitation even concerning the mysteries of the faith. His soul avoids all 'discursive argument' leading to a peculiar disintegration of the unity and integrality of the

life of the spirit panting in prayer after God.^{xi} Constant preoccupation with prayer distracts the mind from the outside world, and were it not for habit formed down the years everyday tasks would be impossible.

‘The soul from love of the Lord has lost her wits. She sits in silence, with no wish to speak, and looks upon the world with mazed eyes, having no desire for it and seeing it not. And people do not know that she is contemplating her beloved Lord, that the world has been left behind and is forgotten, for there is no sweetness therein.’

^{xi} cf. Ps. xlii:1.

XI

'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not'

The ascetic in spiritual contemplation beholds things which for the overwhelming majority of people are a mystery but afterwards he is faced with the impossibility of communicating this mystery – translated into human language it is construed quite otherwise by him who hears it. The language of human words and concepts is able only to a very limited extent to convey one man's inner state to another. The indispensable condition for mutual understanding is a common or identical experience. Without it there cannot be understanding because behind our every word lies our whole life. Into every concept each one of us introduces the compass of his own experience and knowledge, which makes it unavoidable that we should all speak in different tongues. Yet, since we all share a common nature, it is equally possible by words to provoke a new experience in the soul of another, and thus generate new life in him. And if this applies to human intercourse, how much more so does it apply where Divine action is involved. The word of God does, in fact, given a certain inner disposition of the soul, offer new life – the eternal life which is contained within it. 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.'ⁱ

No reader of the Gospels can fail to notice the apparent lack of sequence in Christ's conversation. Consider, for example, the exchanges with Nicodemus, with the woman of Samaria, with the Disciples at the Last Supper. Christ's interest is directed, not so much to what man says as to what

ⁱ John vi:63.

there is in his heart of hearts, and to what he is capable of receiving from God.

Bearing in mind, then, not only the inadequacy but the clumsiness of language as a medium, let us now examine that strange manner of dialogue between God and the Staretz at prayer which concluded with the Staretz hearing within himself the words, *Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not*. At first reading there appears to be little of profound significance about this prayer-colloquy. But if we understood its inner meaning, and the force of the revelation given to Silouan, we should be shaken to our very depths.

Year after year, weeping, the Staretz implored the Saviour that the world should know God. If people, he thought – and by people he meant all human beings – could know the love and humility of God, like St. Paul they would ‘count all things but loss . . . count them but dung.’ⁱⁱ Their pastimes and interests would seem like childish toys, and with their whole strength, day and night, they would pursue this humility, this love. And if it were thus, so the Staretz would say, the entire face of the earth and the fate of all mankind would be transfigured, ‘in a single hour’. So powerful is Christ-like humility.

On Mount Tabor and on the day of Pentecost it was revealed to Peter with indisputable force that ‘there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’ The ancients of Israel and the Scribes ‘marvelled at the boldness of Peter and John, unlearned and ignorant men.’ⁱⁱⁱ

To the ‘unlettered and simple’ Silouan, mysteries hid from the wise and prudent were likewise revealed, and the night of that supranatural prayer-colloquy is of immense importance in his life. The world is plunged deep in the darkness of spiritual ignorance. The way to life eternal is preached

ⁱⁱ. Phil. iii:8.

ⁱⁱⁱ. Acts iv:12–13.

unceasingly in all languages but in each generation those who really find it may be counted on one hand.

Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not. What does it mean – to ‘keep the mind in hell’? Can it be that we are to use our imagination to conjure up circumstances for ourselves similar to those figured in some primitive painting? In this instance, no. Father Silouan, like certain great Fathers – St. Antony, St. Sisoë, St. Makarios, St. Pimen – during his lifetime actually descended into the darkness and torments of hell. They did this not once but over and over again until their hearts were so permeated that they were able to repeat the movement at will. They took refuge in it when passion – especially that most subtle of passions, pride – reared its head.

The struggle against pride is, in fact, the final stage in the battle against the passions. To begin with, the ascetic must wrestle with the greater passions of the flesh, then with irritability and, finally, pride. This last combat is undoubtedly the most painful of all. Taught by long experience that pride leads to loss of grace, the ascetic consciously descends into hell where every passion is ‘seared with a hot iron’.

The Staretz observed that most people despair when they approach this state, and give in. This is why the great Sisoë said, ‘Who can bear St. Antony’s thought? By the way, I know a man’ (it was himself, Sisoë) ‘who is able to bear it’.

Here, as Staretz Silouan explained, Sisoë was thinking of what St. Antony learned from the shoemaker of Alexandria. St. Antony had prayed the Lord to show him to what measure he had attained. And the answer was, that he had not reached the standard of a certain shoemaker in Alexandria. St. Antony made his way to the man and asked him how he lived. The latter replied that he gave a third of his earnings to the church, a third to the poor, and kept the rest for his own needs. Antony, who had himself given up all he possessed and lived in the desert in greater poverty than the shoemaker, found nothing extraordinary in this. It was not

here that he excelled. Antony said to him, 'The Lord sent me to you to see how you live.' Then the humble working-man, who looked up to St. Antony and was dismayed by his words, answered, 'I don't do anything special. Only, when I am working I look at passers-by and think, "They'll all be saved, only I shall perish".'

Antony, sent by God to learn of the shoemaker; Antony, prepared by long and extraordinarily arduous ascetic struggle (that had amazed all Egypt) to grasp the real meaning of what the shoemaker said, sensed the force of his words and realised that he had not attained to the stature of the man. Returning to the desert, he applied himself to the matter and taught it to other anchorites who had need 'not of milk but of strong meat.'^{iv} Since then other of the great Desert Fathers have passed it down through the centuries, a priceless heritage. Each of them, it is true, expressed it in his own way. Pimen the Great, for instance, used to say to his disciples, 'Believe me, my children, where Satan is, there shall I be cast also'; but in essence the message remains the same.

Blessed Staretz Silouan said that many ascetics when they approached that state – which is vital if one would be cleansed of the passions – would fall into despair and be unable to continue. But the one who knows 'how greatly the Lord loveth us' escapes the pernicious effect of total despair and knows how to stand prudently *on the verge* so that the hellish fire burns away his every passion and he does not fall victim to despair. 'And despair not.'

If the Staretz' account is a simple one – as simple as the shoemaker's of Alexandria – the power and mystery of the matter will remain incomprehensible for anyone who has not known a similar experience of hellish torment, on the one hand, and the great gifts of grace, on the other.

Especially after that night of supernatural conversation in prayer the Staretz' long life of spiritual struggle was wholly

^{iv} cf. Heb. v:12–14.

devoted to the search for humility. And if we would know the manner and secret of that striving we must meditate on his 'beloved song'.

'Soon I shall die, and my accursed soul will descend into hell. There I shall suffer alone in the darkness of the prison-house, and cry with bitter tears: "My soul wearies after the Lord, and I seek Him in tears." How could I not seek Him? He first sought me out and manifested Himself to me a sinner.'

When he said, 'My accursed soul will descend into hell,' it was no mere figure of speech: he was referring to a real experience of hell – an experience which through the years ate its way into his heart, to such a degree that he was able by a deliberate movement of his spirit to renew it in himself. And when the burning torment had achieved its end – had destroyed the passionate thought or feeling – he would stay the all-consuming fire by the saving action of the love of Christ which he also knew and bore within him.

He learned of this when he heard the response, 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not'. The first words of his 'beloved song' plunged him into hell, then, by reminding him of God's love he eluded despair. 'And despair not.'

Very few are able to do as the Staretz did. By persevering in this struggle, the soul grows accustomed and acquires endurance – the thought of hell so takes over the soul as almost to become permanent. And this persistence is indispensable, for man 'clothed with flesh and living in the world' is constantly subject to the pressure of sin all around him, to defend himself against which he must put on the armour of humility to the utmost degree.

The Staretz declared, 'The Lord Himself taught me the way to humble myself. "Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not" Thus is the enemy vanquished. But when my mind emerges from the fire, the suggestions of passion gather strength again.'

This brief inconsistent exposé is incapable of conveying any real understanding of the ineffably wondrous life where extreme suffering is allied to extreme bliss, the one accompanying the other in the strangest manner. If the suffering existed alone, it would be impossible to bear it. And if there were only bliss, that, too, would be past bearing.

XII

The Divine Word and the Bounds of Created Nature

Every human thought, every human word, is energy, a force. And if this is true where human thought and speech are concerned, how much more so is it with the Divine word, the word of Christ.

When we hear Christ's Gospel sayings, so fragrant, so gentle and sweet – 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God' or 'This is my commandment, That ye love one another' or, 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart' – let us not forget that this tender word of Christ is that inconceivable, infinite force that summoned from the darkness of non-existence into the light of life all that exists, the countless number of worlds, all the incalculable diversity of reasonable and non-reasonable beings.

Christ's word, humbly expressed in the easily acceptable terms of human language that can even be put into writing – this word is, in its essence, the energy of the All-powerful God and Creator of all things. It must be said of it the same thing as the Scriptures say of God Himself – that it is a 'consuming fire',ⁱ to be approached with fear and trembling.

'Thy word has been very fully tried'ⁱⁱ with fire.

Christ's word is the most mysterious of words. It is inaccessible, incomprehensible even to the greatest minds, while at the same time so simple and clear as to come within the grasp of little children.

ⁱ. Heb. xii:29.

ⁱⁱ. *Septuagint* Ps. cxviii:140.

Christ's word is so close to us, so intelligible, so deeply related to the human heart, yet there can be no doubting that it infinitely surpasses the forces of created nature. It is divine, incomprehensible, supernatural and, as St. Paul said, 'not of man and not after man.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Christ's word, addressed to the free man, is gentle, without violence, while at the same time it knows no bounds, is masterful as the word of absolute authority, as the word of the undivided Master of all that exists. 'Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away,'^{iv} says Christ.

Christ's word, when received in profound faith, leads man to eternal life along paths where he will encounter much that is strange and unknown to them that do not follow Christ. On this lofty path everything that man is to meet with and experience in his existence will be revealed to him. The light of Christ's word probes the depths of the dark abyss, revealing the real nature of a multitude of phantoms of truth that attract man. Christ's word is fire that puts to the test everything in man and, generally speaking, everything in cosmic existence, for, as Paul the Apostle testified, 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight.'^v Christ's word is spirit and eternal life, fulness of love and heavenly joy. Christ's word is uncreated Divine light . . . It is addressed, not to the superficial, discursive reason but to man's deep heart, and he who will open his heart right up worthily to receive this divine light, to merge into it, becomes like unto God.^{vi}

Christ's words, realised in life, make man a god.

'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.'^{vii}

ⁱⁱⁱ. cf. Gal. i:11-12.

^{iv}. Mark xiii:31.

^v. Heb. iv:13.

^{vi}. cf. Rev. iii:20.

^{vii}. John i:18.

The coming of God-the-Word (the *Logos*) in the flesh and His word lie at the root of Christian life. This life is not to be explained to those lacking experience of it, and so it would be useless to try to describe man's spiritual *lieu* at the time. Both the bottomless pit of 'outer darkness' and the eternal light of Divinity appear before him, and he stands between the two. He prays then with his whole heart, and suffers, conscious of his critical state. He prays with the utmost intensity, concentrating his whole being.

When St. Seraphim of Sarov stood a thousand days and nights on a rock, imploring 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner,' we can all understand, if only vaguely, the titanic struggle in which his spirit was engaged.

Antony the Great, Arsenius the Great, Seraphim of Sarov and our other Fathers were men of quite extraordinary courage – they renounced the world, scorned all danger. And when they weep, it is not over some material loss, or any temporal deprivation. Obviously, they saw before them something far more terrifying than anything that could threaten them on earth.

To these illustrious names and others of their like let me add that of Staretz Silouan. When we read his *Adam's Lament*, to which the whole desert – the great desert of the world – gave ear, we must not forget that the lament was his own, Silouan's. He lived the great tragedy of the fall of man. He shed spiritual tears, compared with which man's ordinary weeping is nothing. Only one who has seen the eternal light of God could weep like that. People who have not seen – or, as the Staretz himself put it, have not known – God cannot understand such suffering, cannot weep such tears.

Contact with the Staretz showed me that the true Christian, the devout ascetic, is faced with the whole range of human potentiality. All the problems of human existence confront him, and do so with extraordinary insistence – the problems of life and death, of freedom and creativity, the meaning of life and of suffering; problems concerning the relation

between revelation and faith, faith and knowledge, law and grace, eternity and time, God and His affinity with the world and mankind, of the destinies of the world and Divine Judgment.

The experience of the great ascetics demonstrates that the entire sequence of these problems, the whole range of dogmatic premises, passed before them but in conditions radically dissimilar to those in which scientific activity operates. The human spirit is led by the Spirit of Christ to knowledge of God, existential knowledge, so that the very word 'knowledge' denotes, not abstract intellectual assimilation, not rational understanding, but entry into divine being, communion in being.

When we say that the potentialities of human nature open up to the full before the Christian ascetic; when we speak of the plenitude of Christian experience – of universal Christian experience, that is – we are not referring to the experience of various professions, the sphere of scientific knowledge or sundry other domestic or social situations, or differences of age, and so on. No, we are speaking of the possibility for man to know the fathomless depths of the fall and experience repentance and resurrection in Christ.

The first kind of experience – of the professions, of scientific knowledge, social conditions *et al.* – belongs on the plane of temporal, empirical existence and therefore means fragmentation and infinite diversity; whereas the experience of redemption and resurrection in Christ is the experience of eternity, and manifests man's likeness to God and the consubstantiality of the human race. Though empirical experience, when it exists, can add nothing to the growth of the spirit, and its absence does not in any wise diminish it – it still forms the background, and, to a certain extent, a condition for our life in Christ. We all of us, extremely restricted on the physical plane, can only have a very limited experience of the world around us but the spirit of man is such that, despite the curbs imposed by his empirical exist-

ence, he is not deprived of the possibility of coming 'unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'^{viii}

The second-category experience does not depend, in its ultimate profundity, on the external conditions of human life. In other words, there are not, and cannot be, any outside circumstances making it absolutely impossible to observe Christ's commandments.

My readers may ask, Is it not claiming too much when we say that the potentialities of human nature open up to the full before the Christian ascetic? Is not this experience, like others, only one form of infinitely rich cosmic being comprising numerous spheres of reality available to one or another kind of experience – one to science, for instance, another to art, a third to philosophy, a fourth to pantheism, a fifth to Christianity, and so on?

In stating that the Christian embraces the human being's full potentiality, I proceed from the idea that the existence of every reasonable created being oscillates between two poles – the one, love towards God to the point of self-hatred; the other, love of self to hatred of God.

No reasoning created being can escape these two poles of attraction. Everything that happens in our personal life is in reality our spiritual self-determination precisely on this plane, regardless of whether we are rationally aware of it or whether this self-determination springs from the irrational depths of our unconscious, where our rational thinking also starts. In defining both, the same words are used – love and hate, only in a different sequence, a different connection. The difference, however, is not only in the sequence but also in the profound meaning of the words. In the first instance, it is a case of holy and total love, holy and total hatred; the second refers to sinful self-love and sinful hatred. The first

^{viii}. Eph.iv:13.

type of hatred – self-hatred – springs from the fulness of our love for God, from the total concentration of all the forces of our being in God, to the point of forgetfulness of self, of reluctance to consider oneself. This reluctance to consider oneself assumes an absolute character, and so is defined as ‘wrath’ or ‘self-hatred’. Any consideration of self diminishes – even puts a stop to – our abiding in the light of the Divinity, and so whoever has known the love of God and the bitterness of losing it, angrily turns away from everything that might lead to such loss.

Hatred towards God must be considered quite otherwise. Those who love themselves to the point of hating God are those who ‘love darkness rather than light’.^{ix}

God calls all men to Him but not all respond to His appeal. Those who heed the summons face sore trials regulated by God according to the measure of their fidelity and devotion to Him. Manifold and most fiery are the ordeals set before them that love God, and for them that lack deep-rooted trust in God they are unendurable and can lead to mental illness. Only profound faith and love inspire the great courage of which the Staretz speaks. This courage preserves man from falling sick when he encounters the world of evil spirits.

The man who loves God, though he experiences these sufferings remains not only normal – that is to say, not only master of himself, in full mental and moral control of himself, and of everything that denotes normality – he attains to an incomparably more profound depth and delicacy of all these faculties than is to be observed ordinarily.

The one who knows by experience the sublimity and the difficulties of the Christian way is rent in two. On one side there is the burning desire for all men to know the True God and the light of eternal life; on the other, fear lest those who are called be unable to sustain the heavy ordeal. This

^{ix} cf. John iii:19.

is why he generally prefers to turn to God and pray for the salvation of one and all, rather than preach. True Christianity is hardly ever preached in the world – the preaching surpasses man's strength. True Christianity by its very nature is never aggressive.

All through the history of Christianity we notice how extremely reserved the holy ascetics were, though it might seem that perhaps they should have spoken out more openly about the experiences accorded to them. This caution is induced, on the one hand, by recognition that if people – who in general fear suffering and are reluctant to make the slightest spiritual effort – heard tell of the labours and pains endured by these ascetics, they would simply recoil from Christianity. Then again, the holy Fathers knew that when God calls one to this combat by His grace, what seems unbearable to those who have not known the divine love looks quite different.

God is invisible and the spiritual paths leading to Him are not to be seen. And so how can one describe in words that mysterious life which is made up of the sublime struggle that Christ wages for man's eternal life – man created by Him and beloved by Him?

God cares for man's freedom as the most precious principle that he possesses, and so in humility draws the soul to His love. But on the path to this love man comes up against the violator, the devil. The Lord allows that it should be so. God trains man's soul, not by removing evil from his path but by giving him the strength necessary to overcome all evil.

Man's way to God is diffused with combat. The ascetic spirit, yearning for eternal Divine love, cannot acquire true knowledge and become capable of this love without enduring a long sequence of ordeals.

The ascetic is tempted to break away from the Divine love

by the protests of his own reasoning that cannot contain or accept Christ's law, which seems folly to him. At the hour of abandonment by God these protests assume extraordinary violence.

What can separate the ascetic from the love of God?^x It may be the desire for life, the fear of death; or the pulling power of earthly pleasures. Sometimes illness is the cause, or hunger, persecution and other misery. It may be the loftiness and light of some other revelation or intuition, or the profundity and majesty of some other experience. Or the grandeur of some other possession, or the amplitude of other possibilities. Visions of angels and other heavenly beings, or assaults by the dark powers may interrupt the momentum of love for God.

There are firm grounds for declaring that in his quest for divine love the Christian ascetic will meet with every possible trial and temptation. And so later on he will be familiar with the entire *complexus* of states experienced by everyone whom he may encounter. This is why *startzy* are able to get through to and accept anyone's soul, whoever he may be, independently of his social status, physical age, spiritual level, or experience in the struggle against the passions.

I make bold to assert that contact with Staretz Silouan convinced me that all human paths are known to 'him that is spiritual', the while his own path remains hidden from alien eyes.^{xi}

^x. cf. Rom. viii:35, 39.

^{xi}. cf. I Cor. ii:15-16.

XIII

On the Purport of Prayer for the World

Blessed Staretz Silouan writes: 'A monk is one who prays for the whole world . . . The Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, accords the monk the love of the Holy Spirit, and because of this love his heart continually sorrows over people, because not all will find salvation. The Lord Himself so grieved for man that He gave Himself up to death on the cross. And the Mother of God likewise mourned in her heart . . . The Lord gave the same Holy Spirit to the Apostles and our holy Fathers and pastors of the Church . . . This is our service to the world. And because neither pastors of the Church nor monks may engage in worldly affairs but must follow the example of the Mother of God, who in the temple, in the holy of holies, meditated day and night in the law of the Lord.'ⁱ

Prayer for the whole world, for all Adam, in many instances distracts the monk from putting himself at the service of individuals. One may question whether this withdrawing from individual service means refusal of the concrete for the sake of the abstract? Not at all, for the whole Adam is not an abstraction but the most concrete fulness of the human being.

The ontological unity of humanity is such that every separate individual overcoming evil in himself inflicts such a defeat on cosmic evil that its consequences have a beneficial effect on the destinies of the whole world. On the other hand, the

ⁱ cf. Ps. i:2.

nature of cosmic evil is such that, vanquished in certain human hypostases it suffers a defeat the significance and extent of which are quite disproportionate to the number of individuals concerned.

A single saint is an extraordinarily precious phenomenon for all mankind. By the mere fact of their existence – unknown, maybe, to the world but known to God – the saints draw down on the world, on all humanity, a great benediction from God. The Staretz writes:

‘Because of these people, I believe the Lord preserves the world, for they are precious in His sight, and God always listens to His humble servants and we are all of us all right because of their prayers.’

‘Prayer keeps the world alive and when prayer fails, the world will perish . . . “Nowadays,” perhaps you will say, “there are no more monks like that to pray for the whole world.” But I tell you that when there are no more men of prayer on earth, the world will come to an end and great disasters will befall. They have already started.’

The saints live by the love of Christ. This love is Divine strength, which created, and now upholds, the world, and this is why their prayer is so pregnant with meaning. St. Barsanuphius,ⁱⁱ for instance, records that in his time the prayers of three men preserved mankind from catastrophe. Thanks to these saints – whom the world does not know of – the course of historical, even of cosmic events, is changed. So then, every saint is a phenomenon of cosmic character, whose significance passes beyond the bounds of earthly history into the sphere of eternity. The saints are the salt of the earth, its *raison d'être*. They are the fruit that preserve the earth. But when the earth ceases to produce saints, the strength that safeguards it from catastrophe will fail.

Every saint – Antony, Nicholas, Ephraim, Sergius, Arsen-

ⁱⁱ Palestinian monk d. c. A.D. 540.

ius, Seraphim and their like – constitutes the most precious and eternal inheritance of the whole world, yet the world does not want to know this and often slays its prophets.

It is a curious thing but there are people who do not understand the greatness of religious deeds that springs from their roots in unoriginate Divine being. These people identify the religious, spiritual life with subjective, psychological experiences which vanish as soon as the soul ceases to be aware of them. Long-standing contact with the Staretz, listening to him, showed me that he attributed the utmost importance to spiritual states because of their eternal, ontological significance. He experienced prayer for enemies and the whole world as eternal life, as Divine action in the soul of man, as uncreated grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so long as the world apprehends this gift, so will it continue to exist; but once among the multitude of men on earth there are no more bearers, even isolated individuals, of this grace, then the history of the world will be over, and no human science or culture will be able to avert catastrophe.

Everyday experience shows that even people who in their inner depths accept Christ's commandment to love one's enemies do not put it into practice. Why? First of all, because without grace we cannot love our enemies. But if, realising that this love was naturally beyond them, they asked God to help them with His grace they would certainly receive this gift.

Unfortunately, it is the opposite that prevails. Not only unbelievers but people who call themselves Christians are afraid of acting towards their enemies according to Christ's commandment. They think that to do so would only be of advantage to the other side, seeing the enemy refracted through the distorting prism of hatred as having nothing good in him, that he would take advantage of their 'indulgence' and respond to their love either by crucifying or

shamelessly crushing and subjugating them, thus letting evil, as generally personified by this enemy, triumph.

The idea that Christianity is 'wishy-washy' is profoundly mistaken. The saints possess a force powerful enough to sway people, influence the masses, but theirs is the *reverse* method – they make themselves servants of their brethren, and thus win for themselves a love in its essence imperishable. By following this course they gain a victory that will obtain 'world without end', whereas a victory won through violence never lasts and by its nature is more to the shame than to the glory of mankind.

The Staretz interpreted both the incarnation of God-the-Word and Christ's whole earthly life as love towards the whole world, though the world is totally hostile to God. Similarly, he knew the Holy Spirit in the love which with its advent drives away all hatred, like light cancelling darkness; in the love which likens man to Christ in the inmost impulses of his soul. And this, according to the Staretz' teaching, is true faith.

'Many there are who have studied all the religions but the true faith, the faith one ought to have, they have not discovered. But whoever humbly prays to God for enlightenment, the Lord will show him how greatly He loves mankind.'

People are afraid to cast themselves in the fire which the Lord brought down on earth. They fear to be consumed therein and so 'lose' their soul. But those who are not afraidⁱⁱⁱ – like the Staretz, for instance – know that they have found eternal life. They know for certain and have no need of any witness other than the Spirit testifying in themselves.^{iv}

The Staretz spent many years in prayer for the world and – we do not know how – God apprised him that so long as

ⁱⁱⁱ. cf. Luke xvii:33; John xii:25.

^{iv}. I John iii:14; v:10.

such love and prayer continues in the world, God will preserve the world but when love for enemies vanishes off the face of the earth, then the world will perish in the flames of universal discord.

The way of the Staretz is the way of the saints as appointed by Christ Himself but the world as a whole has not accepted it. To fight against evil manifest alike on the physical plane, people have recourse to physical force. Even Christians often adopt this course. In the Middle Ages the Western Church found dogmatic justification for physical fighting against evil, and even to this day has not recanted. Then it was the 'Holy Inquisition'. Now it takes other forms which nevertheless in their spiritual reality remain the same. The history of the Orthodox Church, past and present, right up to our own day reveals frequent instances of a leaning towards the idea of physical combat against evil, though fortunately confined to individual prelates or ecclesiastical groups. The Orthodox Church herself has not only declined to bless or to impose these measures but has always followed in the steps of the crucified Christ, Who took upon Himself the burden of the sins of the world.

The Staretz was profoundly and very precisely aware that only good can defeat evil – that using force simply means substituting one sort of violence for another. We discussed this many a time. He would remark, 'The Gospel makes it plain that when the Samaritans did not wish to receive Christ, the disciples James and John wanted to bring down fire from heaven, to consume them, but the Lord rebuked them and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. I am come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them" 'v. *And we, too, must have but this one thought – that all should be saved.*

To my shame and embarrassment God willed me to live in

cf. Luke ix:52–56.

close contact with the Staretz and to glimpse in him what a wondrous life Christ brought to the world; to see how in one same heart profound and unshakeable peace can co-exist with profound and agonising lamentation; how joy and tranquillity can synchronise with the spiritual torment of one who lives the tragedy of mankind.

The law (if the term *law* be appropriate here) of eternal life finds expression in two commandments: love for God and love for one's fellow-man. But when an ascetic withdraws from the world, to start with his attention is concentrated on the first commandment and on his own personal repentance, thus giving an impression of egoism. Later, when repentance attains a certain degree of fulness and grace touches his soul, he begins to feel Christ-like love in his soul, spilling out on all humanity. Then, though living in the desert and not seeing the world with his bodily eyes, he sees it in spirit and then lives in depth the world's sufferings, for he lives them with a Christian consciousness of the unique character and great eternal worth of every human being.

Wherever man may betake himself, whatever desert he may retire to, if he treads the path of real life in God he will live the tragedy of the world, and live it even more intensely and profoundly than those actually in the world, because the latter do not know what they are missing. Men suffer many privations but with the rare exception they are not conscious of their main lack. When they are deprived of their worldly goods and realise what they are missing, they suffer and lament; but what would the weeping and wailing be like if they realised their chief deprivation! With what ardour would they seek 'the one thing needful'!

There may be true sorrow for the world, a hallowed grief, pleasing to God, but there may also be a perverse, negative dejection. In the soul of one who has not known perfect love, the two commandments of Christ not seldom find themselves in sharp contradiction. He who loves God retires

from the world and plunges into a kind of spiritual egoism. Indifferent, as it were, to what is happening in the world, he concentrates on the salvation of *his own* soul. The man who passionately loves humanity lives its sufferings. Moved by compassion for the world, he rebels against God, deeming Him responsible for the misery that floods the world. Sometimes his rebellion translates into violent hostility. But in the Blessed Staretz one found, in the image of Christ, the one and the other love in their organic whole but differing manifestations. Triumphant in eternity, love is crucified in our world of sin.

God allowed me to glimpse how the Staretz wept lest the world be deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which he had been given to know. He was consumed with deep pity and besought God's mercy on 'all the peoples of the earth'.

Thus true love for man has its source in true love of God. Hence the Staretz' constant affirmation that 'Divine love does not dwell in him who does not love his enemies'.

By 'loving one's enemies', the Staretz did not mean a sort of scornful pity – for him the *compassion* of a loving heart was an indication of the trueness of the Divine path.

Afterword

If we cast our thoughts back over the bimillenary history of Christianity we are dazzled by the enormous wealth of Christian culture. Vast libraries full of the grandiose works of the human mind and spirit – innumerable academies, universities, institutes, where hundreds of thousands of young people drink thirstily of the living waters of wisdom. Tens of thousands of splendid churches, the marvellous inspiration of human genius; numberless precious works created by other forms of art, music, painting, sculpture, poetry. And much, much more. But the Staretz, as it were, ignored all that, concentrating on one thing only – humility and love for enemies. Everything is there.

I remember one occasion in my life when I was carried away by the works of the Holy Fathers and said regretfully to the Staretz, 'What a pity I have neither the strength nor the time to study theology.' To which he answered:

'And you think that important?' Then, after a moment or two's silence, he added, 'In my opinion only one thing is important – humbling oneself, for pride stops us from loving.'

There were occasions when God showed me that the Staretz was indeed the bearer of the Holy Spirit, and so I trusted in his word, accepting it without question, which would have been totally out of place on my part. Now, too, I am not conscious of the slightest resistance to the Staretz' teaching, feeling in my heart that his is the *final* word.

The Lord summed up all the law and the prophets in two brief commandments.^{vi} And at the Last Supper, before going to His death on the cross, He said to the Apostles, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,' adding, 'Ye are my friends . . . I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.'^{vii} And so these few words said it all. Without them, all the laws, all the prophets, all cultures are *nothing*.

Many years have passed since the Staretz' death, and so it is possible now to offer his testimony to the faithful. In one's lifetime one can talk thus only with one's nearest and most faithful friends – and then only on rare and exceptional occasions, for we do not know how we will end up – will our life and death justify what we teach?

And if this teaching were the present writer's it would not be proclaimed, since it is not justified by my life and would not pass muster. But in this instance my work can be likened to that of a postman delivering a letter he has not written,

^{vi}. cf. Matt. xxii:40.

^{vii}. cf. John xv:13–15.

or a compositor printing someone else's text. However, I make bold to think that the Staretz' teaching merits the closest attention and profound study, not just objectively but by living it. I know of no one who so steadfastly, with such truly apostolic conviction – or, to express it more accurately, apostolic knowledge – would have insisted that love for one's enemies is the *sole* authentic criterion of truth, and this, not only in a soteriological sense – that is to say, relating to such or such spiritual and moral way of life where man may find salvation, but also on the dogmatic plane, the plane of abstract, ideal conceptions about Divine Being.

To this day the whole world quests after truth. For the believer the criterion of truth is the Church, since the Church is the 'pillar and ground of the truth'^{viii.} by virtue of her ontological link with her Head, the Christ,^{ix.} and because of the uninterrupted presence and action in her of the Holy Spirit, according to God's promise. But the experience of history has shown that this criterion is not definite enough, since not only the One true Church but all the other 'churches' call themselves the Church, and there is no outward sign to distinguish true Church from pseudo-church. Conversely, the criterion indicated by the Staretz can be termed universal because it affords everyone the possibility – thanks to the control exercised by our conscience of the psychological manifestations of our spiritual life – not only to determine our spiritual state, to know whether our individual path is true or false, but to distinguish the teaching of the True Church from everything alien and perverse.

The Church's dogmatic confession constitutes an organic unity and integrality such as cannot arbitrarily be split up into sections. Any and every dogmatic error will inevitably reflect on one's spiritual life. And if it be possible that some error or deviation in our way of thinking concerning Divine Being or the commandments may not reflect perilously on

viii. I Tim. iii:15.

ix. cf. Col. i:18.

the work of salvation, some deviations and distortions do constitute an obstacle for salvation.

The teaching of the Church is not like a 'pure science', and her dogmas are not abstract teaching about Divine being which would be a 'gnosis' foreign to the Church. No, the dogmas of the true Church always bear two aspects – ontological and soteriological. As the house of the living God, the Church is before all and above all concerned with the question of *life*. Her aim and her mission is the salvation of man, and so she accords primary importance, not to abstract ontology but to the question of salvation. Now, salvation is attained by keeping Christ's commandments prescribing love for God and one's neighbour. Christ's second commandment likewise covers the Saviour's precept to 'love your enemies'.

This is the way the Staretz knew the Christ Who appeared to him, and he insisted that it is the only true and sure way to knowledge of God which is eternal life. It is the way towards knowledge of God through His coming and abiding in man's soul.^x

The true Church always keeps Christ's teaching intact but not all those who consider themselves members of the Church, and even speak in her name, understand it, for the gates of her love are wide open to all, independently of their spiritual level provided they confess the faith and want to be saved. This is why in her empirical reality the Church always presents a mixture of truth, manifest in the holiness of her life, and non-truth, introduced by the sins of her feeble members (among whom certain representatives of the holy hierarchy are to be found).

This greatly complicates the problem of distinguishing the true Church from pseudo-churches which can also point to their historical existence since apostolic times, and likewise preach the dogmatic teaching drawn from the Holy Scriptures but with the introduction of elements alien to Divine

^x. cf. John xvii:3; xiv:21–23.

truth and God's will. The source of the harm and distortion is the sinful will, human or diabolic, which often cannot be, not only logically proved to others but even made clear to oneself. And so in all these instances the criterion indicated by Staretz Silouan is precious because it makes it possible to detect without fail the presence of a will alien to God's will, 'Who will have all men to be saved,'^{xi} and Who gave us the commandment, 'Love your enemies.'

This commandment of Christ's, 'Love your enemies,' is the reflection in our world of the Triune God's all-perfect love, and constitutes the corner-stone of our whole teaching. It is the ultimate synthesis of all our theology. It is the 'power from on high'^{xii} and the 'abundance of life'^{xiii} that Christ gave us. It is the 'baptism of the Holy Ghost, and with fire' that St. John the Baptist speaks of.^{xiv} The bidding, 'Love your enemies' is the 'fire on the earth' that the Lord brought by His coming.^{xv} It is the uncreated Divine Light which shone down on the Apostles on Mt. Tabor. It is the 'cloven tongues like as of fire' wherein the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles in the upper chamber of Sion. It is the Kingdom of God in us 'come with power.'^{xvi} It is the fulfilment of the human being and the perfection of likeness to God.^{xvii}

However wise, learned, noble a man may be, if he does not love his enemies – that is, love his every fellow-being – he has not attained to God. Contrariwise, however simple, poor and ignorant a man may be, if he carries this love in his heart, then 'he dwelleth in God, and God in him.'^{xviii} Away from the One True God, it is impossible to love our enemies,

^{xi}. cf. I Tim. ii:1–6.

^{xii}. Luke xxiv:49.

^{xiii}. cf. John x:10.

^{xiv}. cf. Matt. iii:11.

^{xv}. cf. Luke xii:49.

^{xvi}. Mark ix:1.

^{xvii}. cf. Matt. v:44–48.

^{xviii}. cf. John vi:56.

declared the Staretz. The bearer of such love communicates in eternal life, to which his soul can testify. He is the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit knows the Father and the Son, knows with authentic and life-giving knowledge. In the Holy Spirit he is the brother and friend of Christ – he is a son of God and a god through grace.

Studying Blessed Staretz Silouan, I would often think that from whatever point of view we might consider Christian life, it would always appear to go against the grain of ordinary human life and its scale of values. Everywhere we find strange paradoxes.

In his heart the Christian humbles himself to the utmost, abases himself in his conscience lower than every other creature; and through his humility he is lifted up towards God and finds himself higher than any other creature.

A Christian leaves this world. In his 'selfish' regard for his own salvation he relinquishes everything else as unnecessary. He 'hates' his father and mother, his children, if he has any. He spurns every carnal psychological tie. In his longing for God he 'hates' the world and retires totally into the depths of his own heart. And when he does so totally, in order there to do battle against Satan, in order to cleanse his heart from every sinful passion, then in the depths of this heart of his he meets with God, and in God begins to see himself indissolubly linked with the whole of cosmic existence; and then there is nothing alien, nothing that is extraneous to him.

Having started by breaking with the world, through Christ he finds it again in himself but now in an entirely different form, and becomes linked to it by the 'bonds of love' for all eternity. Then through prayer he integrates everyone into his own eternal life, whatever the geographical distance or historical time between them. Then he discovers that his heart is not just a physical organ or centre of his psychic life but something indefinable yet capable of being in contact with God, the Source of all being. In his deep

heart the Christian after a certain fashion lives the whole history of the world as his own history, and sees not only himself but all humanity, the whole complex of ideas and spiritual experiences, and then no man is alien to him – he loves each and everyone, as Christ commanded.

In order to abide in the love of God it is essential for anger and ‘hate’ to attain their maximum intensity but be directed against the sin that lives in me, against the evil active in me – *in me*, not in my brother.

The entire force of resistance to cosmic evil is concentrated in the deep heart of the Christian, though outwardly – as the Lord enjoined – he ‘resists not evil.’^{xix.}

The Christian’s heart is afraid of everything – of the slightest stir of a thought or unkind feeling. It worries about everything, aches and sorrows, while at the same time is afraid of nothing, nothing. Even should the heavens clash with the earth, the mountains thunder down on our heads with all weight imaginable, in his deep heart the Christian will continue unperturbed.

The Christian is the most defenceless creature, under attack from all sides. The Christian is the slave and, as it were, the ‘offscouring of all things’,^{xx.} whereas at the same time he, and only he, is free and inviolable in the deepest and fullest sense of the word.

Starting with renouncement, rejection and ‘hate’, according to Christ’s words, ‘If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple’,^{xxi.} and also, ‘Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath’ – on the material, intellectual or psychic plane – ‘he cannot be my disciple’^{xxii.} – the Christian con-

^{xix.} Matt. v:39.

^{xx.} I Cor. iv:13.

^{xxi.} Luke xiv:26.

^{xxii.} Luke xiv:33.

cludes by wanting to lay down his life for Christ and for them that love him and them that hate him.

And so, spurning all things, breaking with all things, 'hating' everything, the Christian receives from God the gift of everlasting spiritual love for each and all. Abandoning everything, renouncing everything, he enters into possession of riches that are incomparably greater, more real and everlasting. 'As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.' ^{xxiii.}

Thus, compared with ordinary life, Christian life appears contradictory and paradoxical in every respect.

When I was with the Staretz I often found myself thinking, 'He walks the earth with his feet, works with his hands, and lives among others like the simplest of human beings but no one, except God, knows him.'

^{xxiii.} II Cor. vi:10.

XIV

The Staretz' Demise

To live a Christian life is impossible. All one can do as a Christian is 'die daily', like St. Paul.ⁱ

This attempt to describe something of the great Staretz' spiritual journey brings me now to the close of his earthly life. The last years were spent in ceaseless prayer for the world. Outwardly, he continued tranquil, equable, but his eyes now often held a pensive, melancholy expression. Again and again he would revert to two themes, 'I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.'ⁱⁱ 'Just think,' he would say, 'what compassion lies in those words . . . The Lord makes us all one family.' And he would go on to urge, 'Pray for people . . . Pity God's people.'

When I remarked that it was difficult to pray for people he replied,

'Of course it is difficult. Praying for people means shedding blood. But we must pray. Everything that grace has ever taught us must be performed to the end of one's life . . . At times the Lord forsakes the soul in order to prove her, that she may testify her understanding and free will; but if man does not constrain himself to pray, he will lose grace; whereas if he evinces good will, grace will love him and abandon him no more.'

It was plain that 'grace had come to love Staretz Silouan and leave him no more.' But whither does grace lead?

ⁱ cf. I Cor. xv:31.

ⁱⁱ John xx:17.

In the structure of the world we observe a hierarchical order, a division into upper and lower – a pyramid of being. Yet the idea of equality is deeply rooted in our consciousness and is not to be denied.

Some people, observing the psycho-physical world for the one part, and the empirically-given spiritual state of humanity for the other, and remarking a pyramid of inequality in both, arrive at the conclusion that inequality is something ontologically necessary to human nature. Then, either because of passion or calm and collected philosophical conviction, they stifle the demands of their conscience. Others, precisely on the grounds of conscience, tirelessly strain to achieve equality in mankind's existence.

But is equality possible where liberty is the fundamental principle of existence? Millenary experience of the history of humanity suggests a reply in the negative.

What, then, can be done to alter this state of affairs, so unacceptable to the human conscience? We cannot ignore our longing to see all men equal in plenitude of divine life.

Let us see how Christ resolved the dilemma.

The Lord does not deny the fact of inequality, hierarchy, division into upper and lower, into overlord and servant; but He turns the pyramid upside down and thus achieves the ultimate perfection.

The incontestable apex of this pyramid is the Son of man Himself, the Unique, True, Eternal Saviour; and He says of Himself that He 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.'ⁱⁱⁱ Concerning the angels, we learn that they are beings superior to us in their knowledge and mode of existence, in comparison with our terrestrial existence, but the Apostle speaks of them as 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.'^{iv} The Saviour bade His disciples follow the example He gave them when He washed their

ⁱⁱⁱ. Matt. xx:28.

^{iv}. Heb. i:14.

feet.^v ‘Ye know,’ He told them, ‘that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.’^{vi} Here we are shown both the designation and the *raison d’être* of the ecclesiastical hierarchy – to raise those low in the spiritual scale to a higher degree of perfection, as the Apostle put it, ‘And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; Till we *all* come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.’^{vii}

Christ as Creator – and in this sense, *cause* – of the created universe, took upon Himself the burden, the sin of the whole world. He is the summit of the inverted pyramid, the summit on which the whole weight of the pyramid of being falls.

In an inexplicable way those who follow after Christ become like Him in taking upon themselves the burdens of the infirmities of others. ‘We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.’^{viii}

I speak here of all this in order to indicate the characteristics of the Christian way, and tell of what I could observe in the Staretz’ spiritual life. But I am well aware that there are no words or images to lay bare this life.

The Christian goes *downwards*, into the depths of the overturned pyramid where the crushing weight is concentrated

^v. cf. John xiii:14–15.

^{vi}. Matt. xx:25–27; Mark x:42–44.

^{vii}. Eph. iv:11–13.

^{viii}. Rom. xv:1.

– to the place where the Lord is, Who took upon Himself the sins of the world – Christ.

When abundant grace touches the heart the Christian, animated by the love of Christ acting in him, really does descend to the base of the overturned pyramid, following after Christ, becoming like Him. In proportion to his strength man takes upon himself the burden of his brothers. The intensity of the pain endured in his life fills his heart with deep compassion for all who suffer. The love that feels for others is ready for sacrifice – total sacrifice – for the good of others, while at the same time sweeping the whole man up to God, mind, heart and the body itself. The entire being is drawn to God in ardent prayer, weeping for people, sometimes for a particular individual, known or unknown, sometimes for all humanity since the beginning of time. On other occasions, though, after a prolonged agony of love the soul abandons herself utterly to God and forgets the entire world.

‘When the soul is in God, the world is all forgotten and the soul contemplates God.’

After this interior sacrifice has been offered – after total renouncement – there is a great calm in the soul. Deep peace takes over the soul, the peace of Christ – the peace of Christ ‘which passeth all understanding.’^{ix}

At the base of the overturned pyramid – the unfathomable base which is really the summit – is He Who took upon Himself the sins and burdens of the world, the Christ crucified in love for the world. And there we remark a quite especial life, a quite especial light, an especial fragrance. This is where love attracts the athletes of Christ. Love for Christ martyrises the chosen one, weighs heavily on him, makes his life unbearably hard, until this love arrives at its ultimate desire, and the ways the soul elects to attain to that ultimate end are peculiar.

^{ix}. Phil. iv:7.

‘To pray for mankind is to shed blood.’

And we have seen and witnessed that Blessed Staretz Silouan, in praying for people, for the world, for all mankind, all Adam, did in this prayer lay down his life.

Prayer like this is repentance for men’s sins, and as repentance for the whole world it means to a certain extent bearing the burdens of the world. But to have the audacity for such prayer one must first attain to a certain degree of personal repentance, since to continue to dwell in sin and passion, then instead of bearing the burdens of one’s fellow men, one lays one’s own burden on them. To know the ‘fellowship of Christ’s sufferings’, to be a partaker with Him, we must ‘cease from sin.’^{x.}

The Blessed Staretz often said that the Holy Spirit had taught him to love with the love of Christ. To love with the love of Christ – that is, drinking the cup of Christ, the cup that the Man-Christ Himself prayed His Father to ‘remove from Him’.^{xi.} Christ-like love is bliss not to be compared with anything in this world, and at the same time it means suffering greater than all other sufferings, suffering to the point of death. This last threshold, death, is the final trial of our love and our freedom. He who follows, if only from afar, Christ going up to Jerusalem will understand the fear felt by His disciples as they walked behind Him.^{xii.} This is because every action undertaken according to Christ’s commandments must ‘go through the mill’. *It is never otherwise.* Only after being tested does an action receive its eternal value. Aware of this spiritual law it is often with profound misgiving that the ascetic sets out on the path of love, but afterwards, when he has gone through the test and realises the greatness of the Divine gift to man – God-like freedom and

^{x.} cf. Phil. iii:10; I Pet. iv:13; iv:1.

^{xi.} cf. Luke xxii:42.

^{xii.} cf. Mark x:32.

God-like life – he can find neither words nor cries to express his grateful love for God.

There are times in the ascetic's life when he is fully resolved to die but generally this fire in him is suppressed and its strength in him not manifest. Yet though restrained, and not outwardly manifest, its action is vital, daily even, in order to keep the commandments in so far as lies in one's strength.

When, moved by great love, a man prays for the world he reaches a state in which he is utterly unsparing of himself, and when this interior sacrifice is consummated, his soul accedes to a profound peace that comprehends all things. But once the prayer is over, seeing the world plunged in suffering and darkness, the soul is moved to pray again. And so it goes on, until life is terminated.

Back from prayer into the opacity of psychosomatic life the soul feels a certain melancholy at the inadequacy of her sacrifice – a certain shame, even, for its falsity, as the Psalmist says, 'All men are liars.'^{xiii} Liars, because they do not remain faithful. If today a man says, 'I love,' tomorrow he will no longer find that love in him. So, gradually, there arises in his soul the need to overcome the mendacity of his life and take his prayer to its ultimate truth, which is only to be obtained in death.

Man cannot live a Christian. He can only die a daily death. So long as he is in this world, in this flesh, he is always wrapped, as it were, in a veil, and this veil prevents him from abiding, from dwelling in perfection in God, to Whom his soul aspires. While man is in the flesh, this side of his life is always subject to the conventions of earthly being, and so everything he does is conditioned and he achieves perfection only through the great mystery of death, which sets the stamp of everlasting truth on his earthly path – or,

^{xiii}. Ps. cxvi:11.

on the contrary, denounces it as false. Death as the destruction of the organic life of the body is similar for all men but as a spiritual event it assumes its own especial purport and significance.

This present book does not set itself the impossible task of unveiling in full the mystery of Christian spiritual life. No problems are being solved. The aim is simply to touch upon the mystery and so show, from the experience of the Staretz as I understood it, that the Christian ascetic, guided by Christ's commandments, inevitably finds himself confronted by the injunction, 'If any man hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple.'^{xiv}

When the Christian in his ardent desire for the perfection commanded of us accepts in his deep soul even this bidding by the Lord Himself, there begins an experience of which it can justifiably be said that it leads to the last stage accessible to man.

Christ is perfect God and perfect man – perfect man in the sense of ultimate perfection, of real, genuine man. Only He, the all-perfect man, drained to the depths all the fulness of human experience, while those who follow after Him, led by His commandment and His Spirit, only approach this fulness, without arriving at its totality, at least in the confines of this earthly life.

In writing of the fulness of universal human experience I feel convinced that it is obtainable in all circumstances, so that in this respect monasticism is not an exception to the rule. Each of us is given the same commandment – in other words, none of us is belittled in the sight of God, God has a like measure of regard for each of us. Each of us is provided with the same sum – if I may put it that way – sufficient to acquire the ultimate perfection attainable by man, the price of which is one and the same for all – to be utterly unsparing of self. Being completely unsparing of oneself does not mean

^{xiv}. Luke xiv:26.

just 'bestowing all one's goods to feed the poor, or giving one's body to be burned,'^{xv.} but forsaking all that one has^{xvi.} in the sphere of one's created being in its separateness from God, in selfish individualism and opposition to one's fellow man.

This is only fully to be attained in death, and so to live as a Christian in effect is impossible – one can only die a Christian.

On Thursday 2/15 September 1938 towards five o'clock in the morning (by Athonite time, around 11 o'clock) I went to see the Staretz in the store-house and found him serene as always. He spoke in his normal, level tones. I did not notice any outward change in him. He was busy with his usual work.

About 10 o'clock, after our dinner, I went along to his cell. He was seated on a stool by a small table. Remarking a change in him, I asked,

'Staretz, what is the matter?'

'I don't feel well.'

'What's wrong?'

'I don't know.'

He got up from the stool and sank heavily on his bed, leaning back against the wall, with his right hand propping himself up in a half-reclining position. Slowly straightening his neck, he lifted his head and an expression of suffering settled on his face.

I said, 'Staretz, are you going to die?'

'I have not yet learned humility,' was his reply.

Slowly he hitched his legs up on to the bed, let his head slide down on to the pillow, and lay there as he was, fully dressed. After a short silence, I asked him,

'Staretz, wouldn't you be better in the infirmary?'

'I don't want to go to the infirmary. There are people

^{xv.} cf. I Cor. xiii:3.

^{xvi.} Luke xiv:33.

there, and besides, they might put me under the clock, like last time, and its loud ticking disturbs my prayer.'

'But you can't stay here ill – who would look after you? You really would be more comfortable in the infirmary.'

'If they would give me a separate room, all right.'

Saying that I would go and have a word with the doctor, I went to find Father Thomas, the monk who ran the infirmary and was called 'Doctor'. Father Thomas had received no education in the world but working his whole life in the Monastery infirmary, he had acquired sound experience and even a certain theoretical knowledge. He was a man endowed with penetrating intuition on the medical plane and was extremely valuable to the Monastery, since Mt. Athos has no proper hospitals or doctors.

The St. Panteleimon Monastery infirmary is on two storeys, and so is split into two wards – upper and lower. The lower one is a large room divided in two by a curtain. In the rear half, by the windows looking out on to the sea the two corner beds are screened off by thin partitions making them into two tiny cubicles, one of which the doctor kindly allotted to the Staretz.

Going back to him, I told him that the doctor was giving him a cubicle in the lower ward. The Staretz consented to go but was too ill to walk by himself and had to be supported. Sadly, I helped him along to the infirmary.

The Monastery infirmary possessed no technical apparatus for making a diagnosis. No one could suggest what was wrong with the Staretz. His condition grew rapidly worse. Following the custom of the Monastery in cases of serious illness, he took communion daily. And on the Monday September 6/19 he received the last anointing.

I went often to see him but could not bring myself to disturb him by talking. I simply sat outside the ward at his half-open door, for his cubicle was very small. I had had frequent occasion to see how he lived, and had heard from his lips much that gave me a picture of his inner spiritual

life. Now I was able to a certain extent to watch his approach to the great mystery of death but the actual moment of his passing was hidden from me.

During the last days of his life, from the beginning of his illness to the end, the Staretz kept silent. Before, he used to tell me about a certain schema-monk who lay in the infirmary preparing for death, never opening his eyes lest an impression from without disturb his concentration on God. When a close friend and fellow-ascetic, whom he loved, came to see him he uttered a few brief words with his eyes shut, having recognised him by his voice. I remembered this and with only one or two exceptions did not violate the Staretz' peace with questions.

A week elapsed and his state became critical.

On the Friday evening, September 10/23, shortly before sunset, Father-Confessor Sergius came to see him, to read over him the *Canon of the Mother of God for the Departing Soul*. Going up to the sick man's bedside, the confessor said, 'Your blessing, Father Silouan.'

The Staretz opened his eyes and gazed at us gently in silence. His face looked pale and ill but peaceful. When the priest saw that he was silent he asked him,

'Well, Father Silouan, do you recognise us?'

'I do,' answered the Staretz in a low but distinct voice.

'And how do you feel?'

'All right, I feel all right.'

Was this response dictated by the desire of an ascetic to conceal his sufferings by not complaining of his sickness, or did the Staretz actually feel so well spiritually that he was no longer aware of his illness, which did not infringe the peace of his soul? I do not know.

'We are here to pray with you and read you the *Canon of the Mother of God*. Would you like that?' asked the spiritual father.

'Yes . . . Thank you . . . I would like that very much.'

Father Sergius began to read the Canon. The Staretz lay pale and quiet, on his back, his eyes closed, motionless. His

right arm was folded across his breast, his left down by his side. Without moving his left hand, I cautiously found and felt his pulse. It was very irregular – now hardly perceptible, now stronger, changing several times in half a minute.

The reading of the *Canon for the Dying* drew to a close. The Staretz opened his eyes again and softly thanked us, and we left him, saying, ‘Goodbye, until the morning’.

At midnight the infirmarian, Father Nikolai, went into the Staretz’ cubicle. The Staretz asked him,

‘Are they saying Matins?’

‘Yes,’ replied Father Nikolai, and added, ‘Do you need anything?’

‘No, thank you, nothing.’

The quiet manner in which the Staretz asked his question of Father Nikolai, and then answered him, and the fact that he could hear Matins which were barely audible in his corner, show that he was conscious and in full possession of his senses. When Matins were over – that is about an hour and a half after this brief exchange – Father Nikolai looked in again and was astonished to find that the Staretz had already passed away. Nobody had heard a sound, not even those in the beds near him. So gently did he go to God.

According to monastic tradition a monk’s body must not be uncovered so there is no washing the corpse. Just the sign of the cross made with a damp sponge on forehead, chest, hands, feet and knees. Clothed in full monastic habit, the cassock with the *schema*^{xvii.} outside, the deceased’s body, including the head, is sewn into his mantle and laid on a special stretcher. Then, following a brief Requiem, the corpse is borne into the chapel covered with a black pall embroidered with a cross in dark red, like the one on the *schema*.

Matins in the infirmary are recited appreciably more rap-

^{xvii.} *Schema* – a sort of scapulary.

idly than in the main chapel of the Monastery and so there was enough time before the Liturgy to get the corpse ready to be carried into church. The Staretz' body was borne on a litter into the infirmary chapel for the Liturgy for the Departed. When this was over, the monks took it in turns to read the Psalter over him.

In accordance with the custom of the Monastery, because the Staretz had been there for a long time and performed much useful work, many priest-monks took part in the Requiem service. After Vespers his body was carried from the infirmary chapel to the main church of the Monastery, St. Panteleimon the Martyr, where several priest-monks chanted the Requiem for the Departed. The custom was for the *Higoumen* to take this service but as the aged Higoumen, Archimandrite Missail, who suffered from hemiplegia, no longer left his cell, it was his deputy Father Justin, who performed the office. After the funeral service for departed monks the Staretz' body was carried to the cemetery, which is outside the Monastery gates, and there, sewn into his cassock with no coffin, he was lowered into the earth while the last funeral hymns were sung over him.

Blessed Staretz Schema-monk Silouan passed away between one and two o'clock in the night of 11/24 September 1938 and was buried the same day at four o'clock in the afternoon.

XV

Testimonies

In their sober reserve concerning human nature Athonite monks stick closely to the precept preached by the Fathers – ‘Canonise no one in his life-time.’ Like everything else in life this legitimate restraint can be carried too far and find itself transformed into an exaggerated fear of human frailty. Athonite monks tend to err in this excess of prudence.

In the course of discussions with other monks Staretz Silouan on occasions expressed the same thoughts as we find in his writings, and as his words exceed the understanding of the ordinary man, a number of monks quite naturally began to fear for his salvation. Some even said, ‘Wait and see how he manages on his death-bed.’ Many of them were fond of the Staretz for his gentleness and unfailing goodwill. It is a curious fact, however, that his quite exceptional life remained almost unknown to most people and only after his death was his saintliness appreciated.*

There was one monk on Mt. Athos, Father Stephen, who

*Concealing one’s inner self from others is very important in the life of every ascetic. There are many reasons that make this a necessity. On Mt. Athos, besides the motives common to everyone there are others dictated by local conditions. The Athonite monasteries and deserts contain many men who have forsworn the world and gone through the flames of renouncement. With the rare exception all of them in their *élan* towards God have offered a sacrifice by which the world was crucified unto them, and they unto the world [cf. Gal. vi:14]. Each one has performed this sacrifice to the utmost of his strength, and so practically every one of them believes that he has realised it completely. After this ascetic effort, after this sacrifice, realising that he has not attained to what he

worked in the Monastery pharmacy, who was very fond of the Staretz. He told me this himself:

‘The day Staretz Silouan died I left my work to go to the chapel and read the Psalter over him, and I implored the Lord to let me understand from the reading how the Staretz had spent his monastic life, and if he had been pleasing unto God. As I entered the church the monk there was reading Psalm 118, “I will praise thee; for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation . . . Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.” When he had come to the end of the Psalm, I said to him, “Go and rest, and I will carry on.” He went off and I took his place at the lectern and began to read the following Psalm 119, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testi-

sought, a monk may suffer an especial temptation – spiritual jealousy. Like Cain when he saw that his brother Abel’s sacrifice was pleasing to the Lord, while his, Cain’s, was rejected, from envy rose up against his brother and slew him [cf. Gen. iv:4–8], so monks, even if they do not go so far as to kill their brother physically, often create extremely difficult conditions for him spiritually. But, aside from these attempts to put obstacles in the way of the religious life of anyone seen to be making progress in prayer and other spiritual disciplines, the private torment endured by the ascetic conscious of his own failures is enough to keep him silent about his inner life.

There are many people in the world who would like to see a saint, to offer him their tribute, and this exposes the ascetic to the danger of pride. But there are also spiteful people who cannot tolerate saintliness and become even more spiteful than ever. However, the overwhelming majority lack experience and do not understand the spiritual man, which makes it easy to stay private. It is more difficult to conceal oneself from monks, who live their lives in spiritual striving and can tell by numerous, hardly perceptible signs what their fellow brothers are going through. So the brethren on Mt. Athos must learn so to comport themselves outwardly that nothing transpires of their inner life. The ascetics on Mt. Athos would seem to achieve this to a high degree.

monies, and that seek him with the whole heart . . . I will keep thy statutes . . . With my whole heart have I sought thee . . . With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches,” and so on to the end of that wonderful psalm. And then I knew in my heart that the Staretz had been found pleasing unto God.’

After the Staretz’ death a hierodeacon asked the blessing of the Higoumen of the Monastery to ‘go into the desert’. Summoned before the Assembly of the Elders, he was asked to explain why he wanted to leave the Monastery. The hierodeacon replied that he thought it would be a good thing for his soul’s salvation. Then one of the members of the Council, Father Matthew, remarked, ‘Isn’t salvation to be found here? The late Father Silouan spent his whole life with us here in the Monastery. Do you think to find greater than him in the desert?’ It was Father Matthew who said this, who during the Staretz’ lifetime had been one of those most worried about him.

Another of the elderly monks of the Monastery was Schema-monk Trophim, a most remarkable ascetic whose life could serve as an example for many. After the Staretz’ death he read some of his notes, and what the Staretz said about love of God, humility, the need to ‘keep the mind in hell, and despair not’ *et al.*, made a profound impression on him. I remember coming upon him at the ‘Small Gate’ of the Monastery. Stopping me, he said, ‘Now I realise that Father Silouan attained to the stature of the Holy fathers . . . The manner of his death persuades me of this.’

I made bold to say, ‘Father Trophim, didn’t half a century of communal life with him in the Monastery convince you of that – only his death?’

‘I always liked him and was glad when we ran into each other but it seemed to me that he talked too frankly with God and, to tell you the truth, I used to worry about him.’

‘What did he say, then, that made you anxious for him?’

‘He expressed himself very simply but somehow when he

talked about prayer and God being his own Father, there was something so bold and daring that sometimes I would interrupt him and say,

‘“Stop, Father.” It seemed to me that he had lost the fear of God.’

‘And when you halted him, what did he say?’

‘He was always even-tempered. I stopped him and he would be silent.’

‘And did he get angry when you stopped him?’

‘Oh, no! He was a gentle person and I never remember him getting angry.’

‘Father Trophim, you know that those who are spiritually beguiled are always rebellious and vexed if they are criticised. Didn’t you notice that?’

‘No, you see God hid that from me . . . He was really a very simple man. It is only now that I understand the mistake I made.’

‘And what do you think of his jottings?’

‘I have already told you – he attained the stature of the Holy fathers.’

A Serbian bishop who made several visits to the Holy Mountain and was very fond of the Staretz, when he heard of his death composed an obituary for his missionary paper under the heading, ‘A man of great love’, where among other things, he wrote:

‘There is only one thing to be said about this marvellous monk – that he was a soul filled with sweetness. I am not the only one to have felt this sweetness – every other pilgrim to Mt. Athos who encountered him felt the same. Silouan was a tall, strong man, with a bushy black beard, and his looks did not immediately attract anyone who did not know him. But a single conversation was enough to make one take to him . . . He could speak of God’s measureless love for mankind, and bring sinners to judge themselves severely.’

After having related several of his discussions with the Staretz the bishop added,

‘This admirable ascetic was a simple monk but rich in love

for God and his neighbour. A great many monks from all sides of the Holy Mountain flocked to him for counsel but the Serbian monks from Chilandari** and the Hermitage of St. Sabbas** were particularly devoted to him. They regarded him as their spiritual father who quickened them by his love. They were all painfully stricken by his departure. And for a long, long time will they remember Father Silouan's love and wise counsels.

'And for me, too, Father Silouan was of great spiritual help. I would feel myself fortified by his prayers. On each of my visits to the Holy Mountain I would make haste to see him.'

The obituary ended with the words,

'And there is much, much more that I heard either from Father Silouan himself or about him from other people. But who could put it all together and write it all down? The book of his life is adorned with pearls of wisdom and the gold of love. It is an immense and imperishable book. Now it is closed and submitted by the hands of his guardian angel to the eternal and righteous Judge. And the eternal and righteous Judge will say to the soul who so loved Him on earth, "Enter into the joy of Thy Lord, My true and faithful servant, Silouan." Amen.'

[signed Bishop Nicholas].

Another Bishop, Metropolitan Benjamin, a Russian who never met the Staretz and only knew him through their correspondence and the accounts of those who were acquainted with him personally, when he heard of his death wrote the following letter (dated 18 November 1938) to Father Prior Justin:

'Most reverend and deeply respected Father Prior and Brethren,

'I have received your letter telling me of the demise of the

** Serbian Monastery and Hermitage.

blessed Staretz Schema-monk Silouan . . . May God grant him eternal rest!

‘It is not for us sinners to pronounce judgment about those who are saints. God Himself glorifies them, as He knoweth. But in all sincerity I can tell you that during these latter years I have never felt in anyone else such power of *grace* as in Father Silouan.

‘It is difficult to put into words what that power consisted of.

‘In the same way as was said of Christ the Lord in His lifetime that He taught them as one having *authority*, and not as the scribesⁱ . . . so it was with me, a sinner – in Father Silouan’s letters I sensed a power that I have never felt in anyone else. *A heavenly divine spirit* . . . which could convince without offering any proof. Like a voice coming from “beyond”, from God . . . I cannot put it better than that . . . That is why I am keeping his letters to me. And even if I knew nothing about his life, his ascetic efforts, his prayer and obedience, just the *spirit of his letters* is enough for me, a sinner, to consider him a saint in heaven.

‘But let me tell of another instance of his clairvoyance.

‘A mother living abroad had long lost touch with her daughter, who had stayed behind in Russia. She was anxious to know how she should pray for her – as among the living or the dead?

‘She wrote and asked Staretz Silouan and he replied categorically that her daughter was alive and well . . . And in fact a few months later a woman who went to Russia, after making inquiries found the girl and was able to talk to her.’

(I have personal knowledge of this instance. I used to help the Staretz with his correspondence, as his amanuensis, and he told me how during prayer God had revealed to him the girl’s circumstances.)

On a later occasion Metropolitan Benjamin told of a similar example of clairvoyance, adding:

ⁱ cf. Matt. vii:29; Mark i:22.

‘I venture to ask whether you could gather and make a *dossier* of all that is known of him? It would be so instructive, such a comfort and encouragement for us sinners. And also collect together all his letters – even if only copies of them.

‘One more thing, will you allow Father Sophrony to send me something that *belonged to the deceased*, and also to console me by replying to the letter that I addressed to him.

[Signed] Metropolitan Benjamin.’

In the letter addressed to me the Metropolitan wrote:

‘Thank you very much indeed for your letter about Father Silouan . . . I hunger to know more about him . . . You will realise from my letter to Father Prior how I regard the late Staretz.

‘And if you could write further about him, not only I but many others would be very, very grateful.

‘Who was he? Where did he live before going to Mt. Athos? Why did he go there? How did he work out his salvation? What did he talk about? (Even the smallest detail is important.) Have you any particular information? How did he pray?

‘While you and other witnesses are still alive – gather and write down everything about him, down to the last detail . . . This is part of the History of the Church.

‘I remember Father Silouan in my prayers along with God’s holy servant Father John of Kronstadt, and ask him to intercede for me before God . . . I thank you again and look forward – I am not the only one – to hearing more, God willing. As to Father Silouan, he is now out of harm’s way.***

[Signed] Metropolitan Benjamin.’

Postscriptum

I set myself the task of recording the more important facts in the life of Blessed Staretz Silouan – in so far as known to

*** Italics and punctuation are those of the writer of the letter.

me – and drawing the reader's attention to the most essential aspects of his teaching. Now I can lay down my pen.

When he comes to the second part of this book – the Staretz' own writings – the reader will remark numerous vitally important aspects of spiritual life that I have not considered – aspects vitally important from the dogmatic and ascetic point of view – but which the Staretz himself broached. For instance, there is the part the body plays in our knowledge of God; or the problem of fasting, which the Staretz treated in the most original and at the same time singularly profound fashion – Christ-like, I would say. 'It is my belief that one should eat just so much that after a meal one feels like praying.'¹ On the other hand, the reader will find in my *exposé* a whole series of propositions introduced by me and based, mostly, on my many discussions with the Staretz. Selecting copy is always a conditional, more or less circumscribed task. To make use of all the available material would risk perhaps distracting attention from my spiritual father's main concerns.

Besides the testimonies already recounted of the veneration in which Staretz Silouan was held, I am aware of innumerable other cases where sick and suffering people were helped by his prayers, as well as of astounding instances of his intuition and clairvoyance. I am inclined, however, to pass these over in silence, partly because the majority of the persons concerned are still alive, as I have said; and also because I am not at all inclined to enthuse over such manifestations, faithful in this to the spirit of the Staretz himself who did not accord them much attention. History knows numberless instances of healing and clairvoyance on the part of people who were in no wise saints. It is not in this aspect of his life that his true greatness lies.

St. John Climacus says, 'Some people glorify above all else the gift of performing miracles and the visible side of spiritual talents. They do not realise that there are many

¹ cf. Luke xxi:34–36.

superior endowments which are secret and thus remain inalienable.' But which 'secret' gift could be 'superior' to the gift of performing miracles? Here is what the Staretz says:

'O, how infirm is my spirit! A little wind can blow it out like a candle; but the spirit of the saints glowed with fire like the burning bush, fearless of the wind. Who will give me such fire that I know rest neither by day nor by night from love of God? The love of God is a consuming fire. For the love of God the saints bore every affliction – it was love of God gave them the power to work miracles. They healed the sick, restored the dead to life. They walked upon the waters, were lifted into the air during prayer, and by their prayers they brought rain down from heaven. But all my desire is to learn humility and the love of Christ, that I may offend no man but pray for all as I *pray for myself*.'★

It is this noble and secret element in the Staretz' life that I have tried to describe. Pursuing this end, I decided to tell of the various ways of attaining to spiritual liberty in God – and do so frankly, ignoring nothing, concealing nothing that I have heard.ⁱⁱ

That same *Ladder* of St. John Climacus contains a remarkable passage about the 'blessed condemned and the penitents' prison.' The hallowed author, prophetically foreseeing that many would be scandalised by that chapter – which is so in the present day – says this *et al.*:

'The valiant man will retreat as though pricked by a goad, by a burning dart to the heart. The less fervent man will recognise his weakness and having easily acquired humility through his self-reproaching, will endeavour to follow in the steps of the courageous man. But I do not know if he will catch up. As to the careless man – it is better that he should not concern himself with what is written here, lest in despair he stamps on what he has achieved so far.'

Anxious not to put temptation in the way of the naïve

★ Part II: *On Repentance*

ⁱⁱ cf. John xv:15.

and fearful by speaking unreservedly about the difficulties of the spiritual battle, I said at the beginning that the present book, by its content is *destined for only a tiny minority*. And now I want to repeat the same warning because however simple a human being Staretz Silouan was, his life was an exceptionally noble one and a great tension of love towards God.

To tell the truth, I had to overcome no little embarrassment before deciding to write the present Life because the circumstances obliged me not to conceal my closeness to the sainted father. I am sure that whoever knew him and knows me will protest indignantly, 'How dare you write about the Staretz?' And who did not know him but knows me, or has just seen me, will remark scornfully, 'If the disciple is like this, the teacher could not have amounted to much.'

I realise that the name of the great Staretz is degraded by having such a biographer and witness. But there was no other solution . . . I should have preferred to conceal myself and publish this work anonymously in order not to belittle the great Staretz by my own inadequacy. But this could not be – I felt it essential to take on the responsibility and testify to him. In part-justification of my temerity I will say that the wishes and urgent requests of many people impelled me to do so, as well as the obedience laid on me by my spiritual father, a wise *staretz* now still flourishing – Hieroschema-monk Pinuphrius. Nevertheless, I had a long struggle with myself because spiritual writings contain an energy of a particular kind. Whoever dares to write is the first to be judged by his words, and so, naturally, I accept the abuse I merit, and know that I shall be condemned by God and man. My conscience is slightly eased, however, by the fact that the present book contains no ideas of my own – it is based entirely on homilies pronounced by the Staretz and discussions with him and my other preceptors. I am afraid, nevertheless, that as one lacking spiritual intelligence (cognition), I have not avoided errors in my account of the Staretz' life and his holy teachings – errors which I beg my

readers to attribute entirely to me, so that the Staretz' image, stamped by his sainted life and sacred word, be not dishonoured.

The Staretz' message – an extraordinarily noble one by virtue of its spiritual perfection – bears witness to the holy life that it was given him to lead. To many, his life will remain incomprehensible, inaccessible, despite all its clarity, its simplicity. Experience has shown that it is incomprehensible precisely because of its simplicity and the unwonted manner in which the Staretz expressed himself. It is this that has led me to explain – even precede – his writings in language more familiar to people of our day, in the hope of helping, if only one reader, the better to understand the path of godliness.

Today, celebrating the memory of our father Staretz Silouan on this the 10th anniversary of his death, my soul in reverent love turns to him with this prayer:

‘Forgive me, holy father, for having ventured in my folly to write of that which thou didst deign to entrust to me. Grateful to God that He accorded me the unmerited happiness of knowing thee, of being with thee during thy lifetime here below, may I, I beseech thee, ask this:

Now that thou hast crossed over from
this earthly life

and dost behold the

searchless beauty of thy beloved Lord

and His most holy Mother,

has the sweetness of Divine love caused thee

to forget our world plunged in tribulation?

Or dost thou continue to pray yet more fervently,
because, as thou didst say

love can neither forget nor find rest

until the ultimate desire be attained?

And though now my benighted soul
can no longer hear thy voice,
yet thy words remain with us

and afford us thine answer:

“The soul that has known God,
her Creator and Heavenly Father,
can have no rest on earth.”

And the soul thinks,

“When I shall appear before the Lord,
I shall implore His mercy on all Christian peoples”
and at the same time,

“When I shall behold His beloved Face,
for joy I shall not be able to utter
for suffused with love man cannot find a single word.”

And again she thinks,

“I shall pray for the whole human race,
that all people may turn to the Saviour
and find peace in Him, for Divine love
would have all men to be saved.” ’

In the profound belief that our blessed Father has attained to God and the perfect love to which he aspired so untiringly, and now in the Holy Spirit he embraces the whole world in his prayer – to a still greater extent even than during his earthly life – not wishing to anticipate the future, imposing on none, only following the *élan* of my soul I conclude these impotent words with the supplication

BLESSED FATHER SILOUAN,
PRAY TO GOD FOR US.

France, Ste-Geneviève-des-Bois,
11/24 September 1948

PART II
THE WRITINGS OF
STARETZ SILOUAN

Foreword

Before embarking on the quintessence of the present work-transcribing excerpts from Blessed Staretz Silouan's own writings – perhaps I may be allowed to reflect briefly on the Staretz' notes.

The Lord said: 'Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice',ⁱ and St. John says: 'He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us'.ⁱⁱ

I am convinced in my heart that these words are applicable to Staretz Silouan's notes. I feel sure that whoever has received from God the mind and wisdom to know Him will be aware in the Staretz' words of the breath of the Holy Spirit.

The Staretz, who was almost illiterate, writes of what was given him to behold. Often his language is like that of the psalms, which is natural since it springs from unceasing prayer. The rhythm is slow, as is characteristic of profound prayer. Again and again he returns to the same theme – that God and all that is of heaven are made known only through the Holy Spirit; the Saviour loves mankind with infinite love, and this love is communicated only through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of peace, of compassion, of love for enemies.

Only a few thoughts engage the Staretz' soul, his mind, but ontologically these thoughts are most profound. They are the measure of all that exists. Whoever in the depths of

John xviii:37.

ⁱⁱ I John iv:6.

his being is inspired by such thinking beholds the whole world as it were through a mysterious spiritual prism.

Whereas for two thousand years now the Divine word has been preached in all languages and in the most diverse manner, the Lord Himself used very few words to tell man of eternal Divine life. The life of God transcends all image. From this sphere of Light inaccessible, in its movement towards the creature, Divine life communicates itself, at first with very simple and very few 'noetic' images, and then, following a sequence of hierarchical degrees, grows weaker and weaker until it arrives at the most rudimentary and feeble form which is really a deformation. For instance – a small child is led up to an ikon and taught to pray, 'Dear God', and so for the child the ikon is not just one of the forms of revelation or theology but the 'Dear God' Himself to Whom he prays.

In its downward flow from utmost purity the light of Divine knowledge arrives at more primitive and often misshapen (cataphatic) forms, whereas in the process of man's development the contrary movement is to be seen – from below to above. Starting from an often rough positive form he rises to a passionless conception of God and even to an ineffable communion with God outside all imagery.

It is not my intention to dwell on the subject of the development of human cognition nor to examine how, starting from empirical concepts of this world they proceed to intuition of Divine eternal being. Let us note only that the inevitable character of this evolution is explained by the fact that teaching concerning God is based principally on Christian morality, as being more intelligible to elementary understanding. Yet, even in this guise though truth is devalued and even distorted, the light of authentic knowledge of God is really present, though depreciated. It is the 'milk' fed to the fainthearted.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱⁱ cf. I Cor. iii:2

If I may have recourse to analogies drawn from current reality, I would compare this descent of Divine light to the beam of light from a projector – the nearer one approaches the source of the light, the camera, the more blinding the light but the smaller the area lit; and contrariwise, the farther one moves from the source of the light, the larger the area lit but the weaker and more diffuse the light. The centuries go by, and people are still being offered this enfeebled and diffused light of knowledge of God, in an infinite multiplicity of words and images. The farther we are from God, the more fragmented our thinking, the vaguer, more disturbed are our spiritual experiences. And vice versa, the closer one is to God, the *narrower*, if I may so put it, the range of our thoughts, concentrating finally on one single impassible idea, which is now no longer an idea but an inexpressible *vision* or *spiritual intuition*.

To understand Staretz Silouan it is essential to keep in mind this last observation. The Staretz was a man of a single idea, which occupied his whole being, the fruit of the Saviour's searchless appearance to him. In this the Lord's mystic apparition he understood that God is infinite love. He stresses that this love is invariably poured out on enemies also, and that it is known only through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit revealed Christ to him, the Holy Spirit taught him humility and love for enemies and every living creature. What he grasped at the time of the apparition, and its immediate consequence, he considered to be the condition and, as it were, the indication of communion with God; the criterion of the authenticity of the way, the measure of every phenomenon of the spiritual life, and the objective of our daily quest and actions.

After repeated visitations by the Holy Spirit, after long years of desperate spiritual struggle – all this took the form in him of dogmatic consciousness; and when he actually rose into the pure spheres of hallowed impassibility, in the most profound humility he considered it his duty to make known

to others what had been given him from on high. He used few words, but this, too, is perhaps a proof of his veracity. He used few words but they are capable of penetrating into the heart and regenerating man's soul. He used few words but one can go on discussing them at length if one's object is to unveil their content and make them accessible, if only to the intellectual comprehension of wider circles.

Perusing the Staretz' writings, some readers, maybe, will wonder, 'Does he not perhaps belong to the category of those whom ascetic terminology labels 'deluded' – in everyday language 'disturbed'? His pretensions are decidedly too lofty for him to be regarded as 'normal'.

But I think that even without seeing and knowing him personally – just occasionally reading his sometimes poetically inspired notes that even from a professional point of view attain to a high degree of perfection but at others are simply unlettered scribbings – one can feel absolutely convinced by following the thread of his thought or the dispositions of his heart that his writings are not the work of someone mentally ill. His every word points to genuine and profound humility – the very opposite of the pride of the megalomaniac or the familiar unhealthy 'inferiority complex', which is a little-understood form of pride. The closest scrutiny will fail to reveal a single shadow of megalomania or morbid boasting of the imagination even when he addresses himself to 'all the peoples of the earth'. On the contrary – one always has a profound feeling that what he witnesses to is true. The heart feels that he has assimilated what he teaches, not from people, not from books, but directly from the Spirit of God, which is why his teaching is so in accord with Christ's commandments.

The Staretz was a man of a single idea, but this idea is the most profound, the most beautiful, the most ontologically perfect there is, and – most importantly of all – he realised it in his own life. In certain passages he is indeed in spirit like to St. John the Divine. Indeed, the Holy Spirit made him like unto Christ Himself, Whom he was deemed worthy to

behold, and of the resemblance to Whom he so often spoke, quoting the words of the Great Apostle: 'We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.'^{iv}

The cardinal attestation of his whole life is that love for one's enemies is absolutely indispensable for knowledge of Divine mysteries. He asserted categorically that he who has no love for his enemies is separated from God, does not know God. There was no deluding him. Where there was hatred towards enemies, he saw black depths, whatever the 'service to God',^v whatever prophetic pathos clothed the hatred.

The witness of such a man untouched by the wiles of intellectualised culture, who all his life shed his heart's blood in prayer for enemies and the whole world, acquires exceptional force and significance.

I often asked myself what the Staretz might have become, if, with all the talents, natural and exceptional, that were his, he had had some formal, some theological education. It sometimes seemed to me that he would have been a giant of world-wide renown. But at other times I thought the opposite – the very fact that here we had someone as instantly receptive as the Evangelists; here was a man completely uncorrupted by the wiles of contemporary civilisation; and it was precisely this that makes his testimony irresistibly convincing. And in effect no human science could add a jot to the depth and quality of the truth to which he bears witness.

So then, whoever did not know the Staretz personally can still get an idea of him through his writings; whereas anyone who did know him, who remarked his genuine simplicity and humility, his ever-welcoming, quiet and meek disposition, saw that here was a man of high perfection.

The Staretz' message is a gentle, often affectionate one,

^{iv}. I John iii:2

^v. cf. John xvi:2

healing the soul, but to heed it requires great and ardent resolution – to the point of self-hatred.^{vi}

^{vi} cf. Luke xiv:26

I

Yearning for God

My soul yearns after the Lord and I seek Him in tears.

How could I do other than seek Thee, for Thou first didst seek and find me, and gavest me to delight in Thy Holy Spirit, and my soul fell to loving Thee.

Thou seest, O Lord, my grief and my tears . . . Hadst Thou not drawn me with Thy love, I could not seek Thee as I seek Thee now; but Thy spirit gave me to know Thee, and my soul rejoices that Thou art my God and my Lord, and I yearn after Thee even to tears.

My soul yearns after God and I seek Him in tears.

O Merciful Lord, Thou seest my fall and my distress. Humbly I entreat Thy mercy. Pour upon my sinful self the grace of Thy Holy Spirit. Recollection of Thy grace draws my spirit to seek out Thy compassion anew.

O Lord, grant me Thy spirit of humility that I lose not Thy grace again, and weep for it as Adam wept for paradise and for God.

In the first year of my life in the Monastery my soul apprehended God in the Holy Spirit.

The Lord loves us greatly. This I know by the Holy Spirit Whom the Lord gave me in His singular mercy.

I am an old man, preparing for death, and I write of truth for the sake of the people.

The Spirit of Christ whom I had of the Lord desires the salvation of all, that all should know God.

The Lord gave the thief paradise. Thus will He give paradise to every sinner. With my sins I am worse than a noisome cur but I began to beseech God for forgiveness, and He granted me *not only forgiveness but also the Holy Spirit*, and in the Holy Spirit I knew God.

Do you see God's love for us? And who shall describe such mercy?

O my brethren, on my knees I beg you to believe in God – believe that there is a Holy Spirit Who bears witness to Him in every church, and in my soul.

The Holy Spirit is love; and the souls of all the saints who dwell in heaven overflow with this love, and on earth this same Holy Spirit is in the souls of them that love God.

In the Holy Spirit all heaven beholds the earth, and hears our prayers and carries them to God.

My soul knows that the Lord is merciful but His mercy passes portrayal. He is exceeding meek and lowly, and when the soul sees Him she is all transformed into love for God and her neighbour, and becomes meek and lowly herself. But if a man lose grace, he will weep like Adam cast out of paradise. Adam wept and the whole desert heard his groaning. His tears were bitter with affliction, and he wept them for long years.

In such wise the soul who has known and lost the grace of God yearns after God and cries,

'My soul yearns after God, and I seek Him in tears.'

I am a sinful man yet I have witnessed the Lord's great love and mercy toward me.

While still a child I would pray for those who gave me offence. I used to pray, 'O Lord, lay not sins on them because of me.' But though I loved praying, I did not escape sin. Still, the Lord remembered not my sins, and gave me to

love people, and my soul longs for the whole world to be saved and dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven, and see the glory of the Lord, and delight in the love of God.

I judge by my own case: if the Lord so loved me, it must mean that He loves all sinners in the same measure as He loves me.

O love of God, no power can describe it, for it is immeasurably great and wonderful.

The grace of God gives strength to love the Beloved; and the soul is drawn to pray unceasingly, and cannot even for a second forget the Lord. O Lord, Lover of mankind, how came it Thou didst not forget Thy sinful servant but didst look down in mercy upon me from Thy glory, and inscrutably reveal Thyself to me?

Always I wounded and grieved Thee. Yet I had but to turn to Thee and Thou, O Lord, wouldst give me to know Thy great love and immeasurable goodness.

Thy meek and gentle gaze captured my soul.

With what shall I requite Thee, O Lord? What hymn of praise shall I sing unto Thee?

Thou givest Thy grace that the soul may evermore burn with love, and day and night she knows no rest from love of God.

Remembrance of Thee warms my soul, and she finds no peace on earth save in Thee, wherefore I seek Thee in tears, and lose Thee again, and again my mind would delight in Thee, but Thou shewest not Thy Face, for which my soul longs day and night.

O Lord, grant me to love Thee alone.

Thou didst create me, Thou didst enlighten me through holy baptism, Thou forgivest my sins and sufferest me to partake of Thy most pure Body and Blood. Do Thou enable me at all times to dwell in Thee.

O Lord, grant unto us the repentance of Adam, and Thy holy humility.

My soul languishes here on earth and longs after the things of heaven.

The Lord came down on earth to raise us to where He Himself dwells, together with His Holy Mother who served Him on earth for the sake of our salvation, and all the disciples and followers of the Lord.

The Lord calls us thither, despite our sins.

There shall we see the holy apostles in glory for their preaching of the Gospel. There shall we see the holy prophets and prelates – the teachers of the Church. There we shall see the venerable fathers, who wrestled in fasting to humble their souls. There those who assumed folly for Christ's sake are glorified because they overcame the world.

There all those who mastered themselves will be glorified, who prayed for the world, bore the burden of the whole world's sorrows, for theirs was the love of Christ, and love cannot suffer a single soul to perish.

It is there that the soul would take up her abode but naught unclean shall enter there, where those who enter arrive by way of great tribulations and chastening of the spirit, and many tears. Only children, who have not lost the grace of holy baptism enter therein without affliction, and there in the Holy Spirit they know the Lord.

My soul ever yearns after God and prays day and night, for the name of the Lord is sweet and dear to the prayerful soul, and warms the soul to love of God.

I have lived a long life on earth, and seen and heard many things. I have heard much music which delighted my soul, and I would think, If this music is so sweet, how greatly must the heavenly singing in the Holy Spirit, glorifying the Lord for His sufferings, delight the soul!

We live a long time on this earth, and we love the beauty of the earth – the sky and the sun, lovely gardens, seas and rivers, forest and meadow, music, too, and all the beauties of the world. But when the soul comes to know our Lord

Jesus Christ, she has no further desire for the things of the earth.

I have seen emperors in their glory, and delighted in the sight, but when the soul comes to know the Lord, all the glory of kings counts for little, and the soul but yearns unceasingly for the Lord, and day and night longs unsatiably to behold the Invisible, to touch the Intangible.

If your soul knows the Holy Spirit, He will make you to understand how He teaches the soul to know the Lord, and the sweetness that lies therein.

O merciful Lord, Enlighten Thy people that they may know Thee; that they may know how Thou lovest us.

Wondrous are the works of the Lord! Out of the dust of the ground He created man, and gave this creature of dust to know Him in the Holy Spirit, so that man exclaims, 'My Lord, and my God;' and utters the words in the fulness of faith and love.

What more could the soul seek on earth?

Here is a great miracle – the soul *on a sudden* knows her Creator and His love.

When the soul sees the Lord, how meek and humble He is, then she herself is *thoroughly humbled*, and desires naught so much as the humility of Christ. And however long the soul may live on earth, she will always desire and seek this humility which passes all understanding, which she cannot forget.

O Lord, how greatly dost Thou love man!

O merciful Lord, bestow Thy grace on all the peoples of the earth, that they may know Thee;
for without Thy Holy Spirit man cannot know Thee
and conceive of Thy love.

O Lord, send down on us Thy Holy Spirit,
for knowledge of Thee and all that appertaineth unto Thee

cometh solely through the Holy Spirit,
Whom in the beginning Thou didst give unto Adam,
and after him to the holy prophets,
and then to Christian people.

O Lord, let all Thy peoples discern Thy love,
and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit,
that men may forget the sorrows of this world,
and forsake all that is evil,
and cling unto Thee in love, and live in peace,
doing Thy will to Thy glory.

O Lord, vouchsafe unto us the gift of the Holy Spirit,
that we may perceive Thy glory,
and live on earth in peace and love.
And let there be neither malice, nor wars nor enemies,
but may love alone reign,
and there will be no need of armies, or prisons,
and life will be easy for everyone on earth.

I pray Thee, O merciful Lord, for all the peoples of the
earth, that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.

As Thou didst suffer my sinful self to know Thee in Thy
Holy Spirit, so let all the peoples of the earth know Thee,
and praise Thee day and night.

I know, O Lord, that Thou dost love Thy people, but
men do not comprehend Thy love, and the nations are flung
about the surface of the earth, and the wind chaseth their
thoughts hither and thither like clouds.

People have forgotten Thee, their Creator, and seek after
their own freedom, not perceiving that Thou art merciful,
and lovest the repenting sinner, and givest him the grace of
Thy Holy Spirit.

Lord, Lord, grant the strength of Thy grace, that all
nations may know Thee in the Holy Spirit, and praise Thee
in joy, just as Thou didst give to my unclean and odious self

the joy of desiring Thee, so that my soul is drawn day and night to crave Thy love.

O the measureless mercy of God toward us!

Many a rich and powerful man would pay dearly to see the Lord, or His most Holy Mother, but God does not reveal Himself to riches but to the humble soul.

And of what use to us is money? Spiridon the Great turned a snake into gold, and as for us, we have need of naught save the Lord. In Him is fulness of life.

If the Lord has left us ignorant of the ordering of many things in this world, then it means it is not necessary for us to know. We cannot compass all creation with our minds.

But the Maker Himself of heaven and earth and all created things gives us to know Him by the Holy Spirit. In this same Holy Spirit we know the Mother of God, the Angels and the Saints, and our spirit burns with love for them.

But he who will not love his enemies cannot come to know the Lord and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit teaches us to love our enemies, so that the soul pities them as if they were her own children.

There are people who desire the destruction, the torment in hell-fire of their enemies, or the enemies of the Church. They think like this because they have not learnt divine love from the Holy Spirit, for he who has learned the love of God will shed tears for the whole world.

You say that So-and-so is an evil-doer and may he burn in hell-fire.

But I ask you – supposing God were to give you a fair place in paradise, and you saw burning in the fire the man on whom you had wished the tortures of hell, even then would you really not feel pity for him, whoever he might be, an enemy of the Church even?

Or is it that you have a heart of steel? But there is no place for steel in paradise. Paradise has need of humility and the love of Christ, which pities all men.

The grace of God is not in the man who does not love his enemies.

O merciful Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit teach us to love our enemies, and to pray for them with tears.

O Lord, send down Thy Holy Spirit on earth that all nations may know Thee, and learn Thy love.

O Lord, as Thou Thyself didst pray for Thine enemies, so teach us, too, by Thy Holy Spirit, to love our enemies.

O Lord, all peoples are the work of Thy hands – turn them from enmity and malice to repentance, that all may know Thy love.

O Lord, Thou didst command us to love our enemies, but it is hard for us sinners, if Thy grace be not with us.

O Lord, pour down Thy grace on the earth.
Let all the nations of the earth come to know Thy love;
to know that Thou lovest us with a mother's love,
and more than a mother's love
for even a mother may be forgetful of her children,
but Thou forgettest never,
because Thy love for Thy creation is boundless,
and love cannot forget.

O merciful Lord, by the riches of Thy mercy save all peoples.

It is given to our Orthodox Church through the Holy Spirit to fathom the mysteries of God, and she is strong in the holiness of her thought and her patience.

The Orthodox soul is taught by grace to hold fast to the Lord and His most holy Mother, and our spirit rejoices in the contemplation of God Whom we know.

But we can only know God by the Holy Spirit, and the proud man who aspires to know the Creator with his intelligence is blind and foolish.

With our minds we cannot know even how the sun was made; and when we beg God to tell us how He made the sun, the answer rings clear in our soul: 'Humble thyself, and thou shalt know, not only the sun but the Creator of the sun likewise.'

But when the soul comes to know the Lord, for very joy she forgets the sun and all creation, and abandons anxiety for earthly knowledge.

The Lord reveals His mysteries to the humble soul.

Their whole lives through, the saints humbled themselves and wrestled with pride. I, too, humble myself day and night, and still am not humble as I should be; but the Holy Spirit has given my soul to know the humility of Christ which He bade us learn of Him, and my soul is drawn to Him without cease.

O the humility of Christ! Fountain of indescribable joy in God! From love of God the soul forgets both earth and heaven, and all her desire reaches out towards God.

O the humility of Christ! So fragrant and pleasant, and only to be found among the angels and saints! But we must count ourselves the worst of all men, and then the Lord by the Holy Spirit will give us to know the humility of Christ.

The Lord and His glory, and all things heavenly, are made known only in the Holy Spirit.

The Lord gave us the Holy Spirit, and we learned the song of the Lord, and so we forget the earth for sweetness of the love of God.

The Lord's love is an ardent love, and allows no thought of the earth.

He who has experienced this love seeks it tirelessly, day and night, and is drawn towards it. But this love is lost to us with the approach of pride and conceit, hostility, fault-

finding and envy. This love forsakes us because of an incontinent thought or attachment to earthly things. For all these, grace departs, and the soul, desolate and despondent, then yearns for God, as our father Adam yearned after his exile from paradise.

Weeping, Adam cried to God:

‘My soul yearns after Thee, O Lord, and I seek Thee in tears. Look upon my affliction, and lighten my darkness, that my soul may rejoice again.

‘I cannot forget Thee. How should I forget Thee? Thy gentle, meek gaze drew my soul, and my spirit rejoiced in paradise, where I beheld Thy countenance. How could I forget paradise, where the love of the Heavenly Father gladdened me?’

If the world knew the force of Christ’s words, ‘Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart,’ⁱ then the whole world, the whole universe, would abandon all other knowledge for to study this heavenly science.

Men are ignorant of the power of Christ’s humility, and that is why they aspire to the things of this earth; but without the Holy Spirit they cannot know the force of these words of Christ. But he who has learned will never relinquish his knowledge, even were he to be offered all the kingdoms of the world.

O Lord, grant me Thy humility
that I may be filled with Thy love,
and Thy holy fear may dwell in me.

Life is burdensome without love for God. The soul feels sombre and stale; but with the coming of love her joy passes description.

My soul thirsts after the humility of Christ, and yearns

ⁱ Matt. xi: 29

for it day and night, and ever and anon I cry with a loud cry:

‘My soul yearns after Thee, O Lord, and weeping I seek Thee.’

O Lord, how Thou lovest Thy creation!
The soul invisibly beholds Thy grace,
and in awe and love returns reverent thanks unto Thee.

My brethren, I weep as I write these lines.

When the soul comes to know the Lord by the Holy Spirit, she stands in everlasting wonder before God’s compassion and majesty, and His might. But if the soul has not yet learned but is only learning humility, she will be subject to vicissitudes: at times she will find herself in conflict with intrusive thoughts, and know no rest, while at others she is released from such thoughts, and can contemplate the Lord and perceive His love. Wherefore the Lord saith:

‘Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.’ⁱⁱ

And if a man will not learn humility, love and goodness, the Lord will not let that man to know Him. But the soul that has come to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit is transfixed by His love and cannot forget Him. Just as a sick man is always mindful of his sickness, so the soul that loves the Lord is always mindful of the Lord and of His love for the whole human race.

What shall I render unto Thee, O Lord?

Thou, O merciful One, didst raise my soul from sin,
and gavest me to know Thy mercy toward me,
and my heart fell captive to Thee,
and reaches unceasing toward Thee, my Light.

ⁱⁱ. Matt. xi: 29.

What shall I render unto Thee, O Lord?

Thou didst raise my soul to love Thee and to love my neighbour, and Thou gavest me tears to pray for the whole world.

Blessed is the soul that knows her Creator, and has grown to love Him, for she has found perfect rest in Him.

The Lord is merciful beyond bounds.

My soul knows His mercy toward me, and I write of it in hope that even one soul may come to love the Lord, and be turned to Him by the fire of repentance.

If the Lord had not given me to know His mercy in the Holy Spirit, I should have despaired by reason of the multitude of my sins, but now He has enraptured my soul, and my soul loves Him and forgets all that is of the earth.

O Lord, humble my heart
that I may be ever pleasing in Thy sight.

All ye peoples of the earth, see how greatly the Lord loves you; how in His mercy He calls you to Himself:

‘Come unto me, and I will give you rest.’ⁱⁱⁱ

‘I will give rest both on earth and in heaven, and ye shall behold my glory.’

‘Ye are not able to understand this now, but the Holy Spirit will give you to comprehend My love toward you.’

‘Tarry not, come unto Me. I await you with longing, like dear children, and I will give you peace, and ye shall abide in joy, and your joy shall be everlasting.’

Dear brethren, I weep as I write these lines.

When the soul has come to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit she stands in ceaseless wonder before God’s compassion, before His majesty and might, and the Lord Himself by His grace mercifully teaches the soul good and humble

ⁱⁱⁱ. Matt. xi: 28.

designs – as a mother teaches a beloved child – and makes the soul to feel His presence, that He is near, and the soul in humility contemplates the Lord with pure contemplation.

The Lord loves man, and His grace will be in the Church until the Day of Judgment, as it has been in times before.

The Lord loves man, and though He created him from dust He adorned him with the Holy Spirit.

By the Holy Spirit we know the Lord, and in the Holy Spirit we love the Lord, but without the Holy Spirit man is but sinful dust.

The Lord instructs His children by the Holy Spirit, and with His most pure Body and Blood, and all who follow after the Lord are in the likeness of their Lord and Father.

The Holy Spirit has made us kin with the Lord. Know, then, that if thou feelest within thyself the peace of God and love towards all men, thy soul is in the likeness of the Lord.

The grace of God has taught us this, and the soul knows when she is enriched by grace; and in like manner the soul feels when she loses grace, and senses, too, the approach of the enemy.

In the past I did not know this, but when I lost grace, then the experience made it clear to me.

Therefore, brethren, with all your might preserve the peace of God which is freely given to us, and when any man vexes us, if needs be let us constrain ourselves to love him, and the Lord, seeing our pains, will help us with His grace.

Thus speak the Holy Fathers; and the experience of many years goes to show that toil is imperative.

The grace of the Holy Spirit makes every man like unto the Lord Jesus Christ while still here on earth.

He who is in the Holy Spirit is like unto the Lord even here on this earth, but the man who does not repent, and believe, resembles the enemy.

The Lord vouchsafed us to be in His likeness, but the Lord is so meek and lowly that wert thou to see Him, from much

joy thou wouldst want to exclaim, 'O Lord, I melt with Thy grace,' but at that moment thou art unable to utter a single word concerning God, for thy soul is transformed from the abundance of the Holy Spirit. Thus it was with St. Seraphim of Sarov – when he beheld the Lord, he was unable to speak.

The Lord bids us love Him with all our heart and all our soul – but how is it possible to love Him Whom we have never seen, and how may we learn this love? The Lord is made known by His action on the soul. When the Lord has visited her, then the soul knows that a dear Guest has come and gone, and she yearns for Him and seeks Him in tears: 'Where art Thou, my Light, where art Thou, my joy? Thy trace is fragrant in my soul but Thou art not there, and my soul yearns after Thee, and my heart aches and is downcast, and nothing rejoices me because I have grieved my Lord, and He hath hidden Himself from my sight.'

Were we simple like children, the Lord would show us His paradise, and we would behold Him in the glory of the Cherubim and Seraphim, and of all the heavenly host, and the Saints, but we are not humble, and therefore we torment ourselves and those we live among.

What joy is ours that the Lord not only forgives our sins but allows the soul to know Him, so soon as she humbles herself. The poorest wretch can humble himself and know God in the Holy Spirit. There is no need of money or possessions in order to know God, only of humility. The Lord gives Himself freely, for His mercy's sake alone. I did not know this before but now every day and hour, every minute, I see clearly the mercy of God. The Lord gives peace even in sleep, but without God there is no peace in the soul.

The Lord does not reveal Himself to many men because of their intellectual pride, yet they still think they possess much knowledge. But what is their knowledge worth, if they know not the Lord, know not the grace of the Holy

Spirit, know not how this grace comes and wherefore it is lost?

But let us humble ourselves, brethren, and the Lord will show us all things, as a loving father shows all things to his children.

Consider with your mind what happens in the soul. If there is a small measure of grace, there is peace in the soul, and a feeling of love for all men. If the measure of grace be larger, there is light and great joy in the soul. And with more grace still, the body, too, is sensible of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

There is no greater grief than to lose grace. The soul then languishes for God, and to what shall I liken her longing? I will liken it to the lamentation of a mother bereft of her one beloved son, who cries out: 'Where art thou, beloved fruit of my womb? Where art thou, my joy?'

Thus, and even more grievously, does the soul yearn after the Lord when she loses grace and the sweetness of divine love.

'Where art Thou, my merciful God? Where art Thou, O Light that never sets? Wherefore hast Thou hidden Thyself from me, and I no longer behold Thy meek and radiant countenance?'

'Rare are the souls that know Thee. With but a few is it possible to talk of Thee. Men are more often saved through faith. But as Thou Thyself didst say to Thomas the Apostle, "Thou hast seen me and felt me with thy finger, but blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."'^{iv} Likewise, not every one perceives the Holy Spirit but all those will be saved who fear God and keep His commandments, for the Lord loves us without stint, and I could not have known this love had not the Holy Spirit taught me Who teaches every good thing.

^{iv} cf. John xx: 29.

My heart loved Thee, O Lord,
and therefore I yearn for Thee,
and seek Thee in tears.

Thou hast adorned the sky with stars, the air with clouds,
and the earth with seas and rivers and green gardens where
birds sing, but my soul is filled with love of Thee and
knows no desire to look upon this world, beautiful though
it be. Only for Thee does my soul long, O Lord. I cannot
forget Thy meek, gentle gaze, and weeping I pray to
Thee:

‘Come and take up Thine abode, and cleanse me of my
sins. From the heights of Thy glory Thou seest how my
soul yearns after Thee. Forsake not Thy servant. Hear me
as I cry unto Thee like the Prophet David: “Have mercy
upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness.” ’^v.

O Holy Apostles, you preached to all the earth: ‘Know the
love of God.’ And it was given to my sinful soul to know
this love by the Holy Spirit; but I have lost this Spirit, and
yearn after Him, and I beseech you to entreat the Lord that
He may give back to me the gift of the Holy Spirit, Whom
my soul knows, and I will pray for the whole world, that
peace may come upon earth.

O all ye Saints, entreat the Lord God for me. You behold
the glory of the Lord in the heavens, since on earth you
loved God with all your souls and with all your minds. You
overcame the world by the power of the grace which the
Lord gave you on account of your humility; you bore with
every affliction for love of God; and my spirit burns to
behold you in contemplation of the glory of the Lord, and
my soul yearns day and night for the Lord, and longs to
delight in His love.

All good elders are humble and in disposition like unto
Christ. Their lives are living examples. They have obtained

^v. Ps. li: 1.

peace and like the tree of life in paradise, they nourish many with their fruits – that is, with the fruits of this peace.

The tree of life in the heart of paradise is Christ. All men may now approach this tree and find nourishment, and feed on the Holy Spirit.

When we have no worthy spiritual director, we must give ourselves up in humility to the will of God, and the Lord by His grace will then instruct us in wisdom, for the Lord's love for us is so great that it cannot be expressed and the mind cannot comprehend it, and only by the Holy Spirit, through faith, can we know this love of God for us which is not made known through the mind.

Some there are who argue about faith, and there is no end to such disputes, but we must not quarrel about faith, but only pray to God and His Mother, and the Lord will enlighten us not by means of argument – and will enlighten us speedily.

Many men have made a study of all the faiths but the true faith they have not come to know as they should; but if a man will pray to God in humility that the Lord may enlighten him, the Lord will make known to him how greatly He loves mankind.

The proud man thinks he can comprehend everything with his mind but God does not grant this.

But we know the Lord: He has made Himself manifest to us in the Holy Spirit, and the soul knows Him, and is joyful and glad and at ease, and in this lies our hallowed life.

The Lord said, 'Where I am, there shall also my servant be,'^{vi} and he shall see My glory. But we do not understand the Scriptures – they are, as it were, incomprehensible. But when the Holy Spirit teaches, then everything becomes comprehensible and the soul feels as if she were in heaven, for the same Holy Spirit is in heaven and on earth, in the Holy

^{vi}. John xii: 26.

Scriptures and in the souls of them that love God. But without the Holy Spirit men go astray and though they study endlessly they cannot come to know God, and have not discovered what it is to rest in Him.

The man who has come to know the love of God himself loves the whole world and never murmurs at his fate, for temporary affliction endured for God's sake is a means to eternal joy.

The soul that is not humble and has not surrendered herself to the will of God cannot come to know anything, but flits from one idea to another and so never prays with an undistracted mind, or glorifies the majesty of God.

The soul that has surrendered humbly to God's will invisibly beholds God every second, yet finds no words for all this, even to herself, and cannot describe it, but only by experience learns to know the mercy of God, and know when the Lord is with her. The soul has surrendered to Him like a little child who receives food every day but is ignorant whence comes this food. Thus is it that with God the soul feels that all is well with her but cannot explain how this is.

O Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit enlighten Thy people that all may know Thy love.

The Lord Himself inspires us to pray for others, and Himself gives us the strength for this prayer, and rewards the soul when she prays. Such is the mercy of the Lord towards us.

From my childhood days I loved the world and its beauty. I loved woods and green gardens, I loved the fields and all the beauty of God's creation. I liked to watch the shining clouds scurrying across the blue sky. But after I came to know my Lord, and He made my soul His prisoner, everything changed, and now I no longer want to contemplate this world – my soul is continually drawn to that other world where lives the Lord. On this earth my soul pines like a bird in a cage. Like a bird straining to get out of its cramped

cage and fly off to the green grove, so my soul strains to behold the Lord anew, for He has drawn her to Himself and she yearns for Him and cries,

‘Where hast Thou taken up Thy habitation, my Light? Thou seest how I seek Thee, weeping. Hadst Thou not revealed Thyself unto me, I could not seek Thee as I do now. But Thou Thyself didst seek me out, a sinner, and give me to know Thy love. Thou madest me to see that Thy love for us brought Thee to the cross and to suffering and death for our sakes. Thou gavest me to know that Thy love led Thee down from heaven to earth and even into hell that we might behold Thy glory.

‘Thou wast moved to compassion for me, and to reveal Thy face to me, and now my soul is drawn to Thee, O Lord, and nowhere finds rest, neither by day nor by night, and I weep like a child that has lost its mother.

‘But even a child will forget its mother and a mother her child when they behold Thee: seeing Thee, the soul forgets the whole world. Thuswise is my soul drawn to Thee, and yearns for Thee, and has no wish to look upon the beauty of this world.’

When the soul in the Holy Spirit comes to know the Mother of God, when in the Holy Spirit she becomes kin with the Apostles, Prophets, prelates and holy Fathers, and all the Saints and the righteous, she is irresistibly drawn to their world and cannot be restrained but yearns and pines and weeps, and cannot tear herself from prayer, and, although her body succumbs and would rest, even lying abed the soul strains towards the Lord and the Kingdom of the Saints.

Old age has come upon me, my body is grown feeble with the years and I would fain lie on my pallet but my spirit rests not – my spirit reaches out with longing towards God, her heavenly Father. He hath made us kin with his Body and most pure Blood and with the Holy Spirit. He has given us to know the essence of eternal life. We know in part : the Holy Spirit is eternal life. The soul lives in the

love of God, in the humility and meekness of the Holy Spirit; but we must give the Holy Spirit room in our souls, that He may dwell therein, that the soul may be sensible of His presence.

He who on earth through the Holy Spirit dwells in the love of God will be with the Lord in the other world, too, for love cannot disappear. But lest by reasoning we fall into error, let us humble ourselves according to the word of the Lord:

‘Become as little children, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’^{vii.}

Woe is me, for it was given to me to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit, but I lose Him and cannot enter into His fulness, even though I perceive God’s mercy towards me.

The Lord loves us more dearly than we can love ourselves; but the soul in her distress supposes that the Lord has forgotten her, even has no wish to look upon her, and she suffers and pines.

But it is not so, brethren. The Lord loves us without end, and gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit, and comforts us. It is not the Lord’s desire that the soul should be despondent and in doubt concerning her salvation. Believe, and be sure that we continue in suffering only until we have humbled ourselves; but so soon as we humble ourselves there is an end to affliction, for the Divine Spirit discloses to the soul, because of her humility, that she is saved.

Great glory be to the Lord that He loveth us so dearly, and this love is made known in the Holy Spirit!

My soul yearns after the Lord, and I seek Him in tears.

How could I not seek Him? He revealed Himself to me in the Holy Spirit, and my heart loved Him. He drew my soul to Himself, and she yearns for Him.

The soul is like a bride, and the Lord the Bridegroom;

^{vii.} cf. Matt. xviii: 3.

and they love each other, and yearn for one another. The Lord in His love longs for the soul, and grieves if there is no place in her for the Holy Spirit; while the soul, having come to know the Lord, yearns after Him, for in Him lie her life and her joy.

A sinful life is death to the soul, but the love of God is that sweet paradise in which our father Adam dwelt before the Fall.

O Adam, our father, tell us how thy soul loved the Lord in paradise?

This is past understanding, and only the soul that has been touched by the love of God can in part comprehend it.

And the Mother of God – what was her love for the Lord, her Son?

No human being can conceive of the nature of her love, save the Mother of God herself. But the Spirit of God opens our eyes to love. And in her was and is this same Spirit of God, Which is love, and therefore he who has come to know the Holy Spirit is able in part to conceive of the nature even of her love.

How happy are we Christians! What a God is ours!

How much to be pitied are those who do not know God. They do not see the everlasting light, and when they die they enter into eternal darkness. We know of this because the Holy Spirit in the Church reveals to the saints the like of heaven and the like of hell.

O, unhappy, erring peoples! They cannot know what true joy is. They make merry and laugh but their laughter with which they laugh, and their mirth when they make merry, will be turned to weeping and affliction.

But our joy is Christ. By His sufferings He has inscribed us in the Book of Life, and in the Kingdom of Heaven we shall be with God for ever, and we shall see His glory, and delight in Him. Our joy is the Holy Spirit, so pleasant and delectable. He bears witness to the soul of her salvation.

O brethren, I beg and pray you in the name of God's compassion, believe on the Gospels and in the witness of the Holy Church, and you will, while still here on earth, savour the blessedness of paradise. For the Kingdom of God is within us; with the love of God the soul knows paradise. Many princes and prelates abandoned their thrones when they came to know the love of God. And this we can understand, because the love of God is a consuming love – it gladdens the soul to the point of tears by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and no earthly things can compare with it.

The things of this earth we may learn with our minds but knowledge of God and of all heavenly matters comes only through the Holy Spirit, and cannot be learned merely with the mind.

He who has come to know God by the Holy Spirit is forgetful of the earth, as if it did not exist; but when his prayer is over he looks with his eyes and sees the earth again.

Brethren, the Saints in the Kingdom of Heaven behold the glory of God; but let us humble ourselves, and the Lord will love us and give us on earth all things profitable for our souls and bodies, and reveal to us His every mystery.

Men have attached their souls to the things of this earth and have lost the love of God, and so there is no peace on earth. Many there are who spend their whole life in trying to find out, for instance, how the sun is fashioned, but they are not solicitous to know God. But the Lord did not speak to us of the sun: He told us of the Father and the Kingdom of Heaven. He said that the righteous in the Kingdom of the Father would shine forth as the sun.^{viii.} And the Scriptures declare that in Paradise the Lord will be the light thereof,^{ix.} and the Light of the Lord will be in the *souls and minds and bodies* of the Saints.

^{viii.} cf. Matt. xiii: 43.

^{ix.} cf. Rev. xxi: 23; xxii : 5.

We live on earth, and see not God, and are unable to see Him. But if the Holy Spirit enter into the soul, we shall see God, as St. Stephen the Archdeacon saw Him. In the Holy Spirit soul and mind will at once realise that this is the *Lord*. Thus St. Simeon by the Holy Spirit recognised the Lord in the child whom he took up in his arms in the Temple; and St. John the Baptist, likewise by the Holy Spirit, knew the Lord and shewed Him to the people. But without the Holy Spirit no man can know God and how greatly He loves us. Although we may read of His love, how He suffered for our sakes, for love of us, if we ponder these things with our minds only, our souls do not rightly comprehend the love of Christ; but when we are taught of the Holy Spirit, we are plainly sensible of this love, and have our being in the likeness of the Lord.

O Merciful Lord, teach us all by Thy Holy Spirit
to live according to Thy will that we may
everyone of us in Thy Light know Thee, the true God,
for without Thy Light we cannot comprehend
the fulness of Thy love.

Enlighten us by Thy grace,
and Thy grace will kindle our hearts to love of Thee.

II

On Prayer

He who loves the Lord is ever mindful of Him, and the thought of God begets prayer. If you are forgetful of the Lord, you will not pray, and without prayer the soul will not dwell in the love of God, for the grace of the Holy Spirit comes through prayer. Prayer preserves a man from sin, for the prayerful mind stays intent on God, and in humbleness of spirit stands before the Face of the Lord, Whom the soul of him who prays knoweth.

But the novice naturally needs a guide, for until the advent of the grace of the Holy Spirit the soul is involved in fierce struggle against her foes, and is unable to disentangle herself if the enemy offer her his delights. Only the man with experience of the grace of the Holy Spirit can understand this. He who has savoured the Holy Spirit recognises the taste of grace.

The man who sets out without guidance to engage in prayer (imagining in his arrogance that he can learn to pray from books), and will not go to a spiritual director, is already half beguiled. But the Lord succours the man who is humble, and if there be no experienced guide and he turns to any confessor he finds, the Lord will watch over him for his humility.

Think in this wise: the Holy Spirit dwells in your confessor, and he will tell you what is right. But if you say to yourself that your confessor lives a careless life, how can the Holy Spirit dwell in him, you will suffer mightily for such thoughts, and the Lord will bring you low, and you are sure to fall into delusion.

Prayer comes with praying, as the Scriptures say; but prayer which is only a habit, prayer without contrition for our sins, is not pleasing to the Lord.

Let me interrupt for a while my talk concerning prayer.

My soul yearns after the Lord, and I seek Him ardently, and my soul suffers thought of no other matter.

My soul yearns after the living Lord, and my spirit strains towards Him, my Heavenly Father, my kin. The Lord made us His kin by the Holy Spirit. The Lord is dear to the heart – He is our joy and gladness, and our firm hope.

O gracious Lord, mercifully seek out Thy creation, and shew Thyself to Thy people in the Holy Spirit, as Thou shewest Thyself to Thy servants.

Rejoice every afflicted soul, O Lord, by the coming of Thy Holy Spirit. Let all who pray to Thee know the Holy Spirit.

O all ye people, let us humble ourselves for the sake of the Lord and the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us humble ourselves and the Lord will give us to know the power of the Jesus Prayer. Let us humble ourselves and the Spirit of God Himself will instruct the soul.

O man, learn the humility of Christ and the Lord will give you to taste of the sweetness of prayer. And if you would pray purely, be humble and temperate, confess yourself thoroughly, and prayer will feel at home in you. Be obedient, submit with a good conscience to those in authority. Be content with all things, and your mind will be cleansed of vain thoughts. Remember that the Lord sees you, and be fearful lest anyway you offend your brother. Neither dispraise nor grieve him, even by a glance, an expression on your face, and the Holy Spirit will love you and Himself be your help in all things.

The Holy Spirit is very much like a dear mother. A mother loves her child and has pity on it; and the Holy Spirit likewise has pity on us, forgives and heals us, enlightens and rejoices

us. And the Holy Spirit is to be known through humble prayer.

The man who loves his enemies soon comes to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit, but of the man who does not love his enemies I have no wish to write. Yet he is to be pitied, for he is a torment to himself and to others, and will not know the Lord.

The soul that loves the Lord cannot help praying, for she is drawn to Him by the grace she has come to know in prayer.

We are given churches to pray in, and in church the holy offices are performed according to books. But we cannot take a church away with us, and books are not always to hand, but interior prayer is always and everywhere possible. The Divine Office is celebrated in church, and the Spirit of God dwells therein, but the soul is the finest of God's churches, and the man who prays in his heart has the whole world for a church. However, this is not for everyone.

Many use their lips to pray, and like to read prayers from books; and this is good and the Lord accepts their prayers and is merciful to them. But if a man prays to the Lord while thinking of other things, the Lord hearkens not to his prayer.

The prayer of the man who prays from habit is always the same, but the prayer of him who prays fervently knows many vicissitudes; now he is engaged in struggle with the enemy, now with himself and his passions, now with other people; and in all this he has need of fortitude.

Ask counsel of the experienced, if such you find, and humbly entreat the Lord, and the Lord will give you understanding because of your humility.

If our prayer is pleasing to the Lord, then the Spirit of God bears witness in our soul. The Spirit of God is pleasant and tranquil. But in the past I did not know whether or no the Lord had heard my prayer, nor how it is possible to tell.

Sorrow and danger have brought many people to prayer.

A soldier came to see me in the storehouse. He was on his way to Salonika. My soul took a liking to him, and I said to him:

‘Pray to the Lord that there be less affliction in the world.’

And he replied, ‘I know how to pray. I learnt in the war, when I was fighting. I prayed hard to the Lord to let me live. Bullets showered down, shells burst, and few of us were left alive; but I was in many a battle and the Lord preserved me.’ As he spoke he showed me how he prayed and by the attitude of his body it was plain how he had been utterly rapt in God.

Many people like to read good books, and this is right, but it is best of all to pray; while he who reads newspapers or bad books condemns his soul to go hungry – hungry because the food of the soul and her true satisfaction lie in God. In God are life, joy, gladness, and the Lord loves us ineffably, and this love is made known by the Holy Spirit.

If you are minded to pray in your heart and are not able, repeat the words of your prayer with your lips and keep your mind on the words you are saying, as St. John Climacus explains. In time the Lord will give you interior prayer without distraction, and you will pray with ease. Some there are who have injured their hearts in their efforts to force their minds into their hearts to pray, so much so that afterwards they were unable to pronounce the words of their prayer with their lips either. But do not forget the pattern of spiritual life: God bestows His gifts on the simple, lowly and obedient soul. The man who is obedient and temperate in all things – in food, in speech, in movement – receives the gift of prayer from the Lord Himself, and prayer continues without difficulty in his heart.

Unceasing prayer is born of love, while fault-finding, idle talk and self-indulgence are the death of prayer. The man who loves God is able to keep his mind on Him day and night since *no form of activity interferes with loving God*. The Apostles loved the Lord, and the world did not hinder them

– though they were not forgetful of the world and prayed for it, and preached. True, Arsenius the Great was bidden to ‘shun people’ but in the desert, too, the Spirit of God teaches us to pray for people and for all the world.

Everyone in this world has his task to perform, be he king or patriarch, cook, blacksmith or teacher, but the Lord Whose love extends to everyone of us will give greater reward to the man whose love for God is greater. The Lord gave us the commandment to love God with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our souls. But without prayer how can one love? The mind and heart of man, therefore, must always be free to pray.

When we love someone, we like to think about that person, talk about him, be with him. Now the soul loves the Lord, as her Father and Creator, and stands before Him in awe and love; in awe because He is the Lord; in love because the soul knows Him for her Father – He is all mercy, and His grace sweeter than aught else.

And experience has shown me that the grace of God makes prayer easy. The Lord loves us and in His mercy grants us to converse with Him in prayer, and to repent and give thanks.

I lack the power to describe how greatly the Lord loves us. This love is made known in the Holy Spirit, and the soul when she prays knows the Holy Spirit.

Some there are who say that prayer beguiles. This is not so. A man is beguiled by listening to his own self, not by prayer. All the Saints lived in prayer, and they call others to prayer. Prayer is the best of all activities for the soul. Prayer is the path to God. Through prayer we obtain humility, patience and every good gift. The man who speaks against prayer has manifestly never tasted of the goodness of the Lord, and how greatly He loves us. No evil ever comes from God. All the Saints prayed without ceasing: they filled every moment with prayer.

When the soul loses humility, she loses grace and love for

God at the same time, and ardent prayer is extinguished. But when the soul stills her passion and grows humble, the Lord gives her His grace, and then she prays for her enemies as for herself, and sheds scalding tears for the whole world.

III

On Humility

Not many elders today understand the Lord's love for us, and know the soul's struggle against her enemies, and that these enemies are to be overcome by Christian humility.

The Lord so loves man that He gives him the gifts of the Holy Spirit but until the soul learns to preserve grace she is much tormented.

The first year after I received the Holy Spirit, I thought to myself, 'The Lord has forgiven me my sins: grace is witness to this. What more do I need?' But that is not the way to think. Though our sins be forgiven, we must remember them and grieve over them all our lives, so as to remain contrite. I did not do this, and ceased to feel contrite, and suffered greatly from evil spirits. And I was perplexed by what was happening to me, and said to myself, 'My soul knows the Lord and His love. How is it that evil thoughts come to me?' And the Lord had pity on me, and Himself taught me the way to humble myself – 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.' Thus is the enemy vanquished. But when my mind emerges from the fire, suggestions of passion gather strength again.

Whoever like me has lost grace, let him wrestle manfully with evil spirits. Know that you yourself are to blame: you fell into pride and vanity, and the Lord in His mercy is showing you what it means to be in the Holy Spirit and what it means to wage war against evil spirits. Thus the soul learns by experience the harm that comes of pride, and so shuns vainglory and the praises of man, and evil thoughts.

Then will the soul begin to recover her health, and learn to preserve grace. How can we tell whether the soul is well or ailing? The ailing soul is full of pride, while the soul that is well loves the humility taught her by the Holy Spirit, and if she does not know this, she reckons herself the worst of all human beings.

Though the Lord take her to heaven each day and show her all the heavenly glory in which He dwells, and the love of the Seraphim and Cherubim, and all the Saints – even then, with the knowledge of experience the humble soul will say, ‘Thou, O Lord, shewest me Thy glory because Thou lovest Thy creature, but do Thou give me tears and the power to thank Thee. To Thee belongeth glory in heaven and on earth, but as for me – I must weep for my sins.’ There is no other way of preserving the grace of the Holy Spirit which the Lord in His mercy gives freely.

The Lord showed great pity on me and made me understand that I must weep all my life. *Such is the way of the Lord.* And so I write now out of pity for those who, like me, are puffed up with pride, and therefore suffer. I write that they may learn humility, and find rest in God.

Some say, this was so once upon a time but now it is over and done with; but with God *nothing ever loses virtue* – it is only we who change, get worse and lose grace. But to the man who beseeches the Lord all things are given, not because we are worthy but because the Lord is merciful and loves us.

I write of this because my soul knows the Lord.

To learn Christ-like humility is a great good. To the man who knows humility life is smooth and joyous, and the heart finds all things pleasant. Only to the humble does the Lord reveal Himself in the Holy Spirit, and if we do not humble ourselves we shall not see God. Humility is the light in which we may behold the Light which is God – in the words of the Psalmist: ‘In thy light shall we see light.’ⁱ

ⁱ Ps. xxxvi:9.

The Lord taught me to stay my mind in hell, and not despair, and thus my soul humbles herself, but this is not yet true humility, which no words can describe. When the soul approaches the Lord she is afraid, but when she sees the Lord, the beauty of His glory fills her with ineffable joy, and in the love of God and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit the earth is quite forgot. This is the paradise of the Lord: All will live in love, and their Christ-like humility will make every man happy to see others in greater glory. The humility of Christ dwells in the lowly ones – they are glad to be the least of men. The Lord gave me understanding of this.

O all ye Saints, pray for me that my soul may learn the humility of Christ! My soul is eager for it but I cannot learn this humility, and I seek it in tears, like a lost child looking for its mother.

Where art Thou, my Lord? Thou hast hidden Thyself from my soul, and I seek Thee, weeping.

O Lord, enable me to humble myself before Thy majesty.

O Lord, to Thee belongs glory in heaven and on earth, but to me Thine insignificant creature, grant Thy humble Spirit.

I entreat Thy goodness, O Lord. Look down on me from the height of Thy glory, and give me strength to praise Thee day and night, for my soul hath loved Thee in the Holy Spirit, and I yearn after Thee, and seek Thee in tears.

O Lord, grant us Thy Holy Spirit. In Him shall we glorify Thee day and night, for our flesh is weak but Thy Spirit is hale, and giveth the soul strength to serve Thee with ease, confirming the mind in Thy love, and according it perfect rest in Thee, so that it desires no thought save of Thy love.

O merciful Lord – my frail spirit cannot approach Thee, and therefore like King Agar I cry unto Thee: Come and heal me of the wounds made by my sinful thoughts, and

I will praise Thee day and night, and preach Thee to the nations that all peoples may know Thee, that Thou art the Lord Who now as of old performeth miracles, forgiveth sins, sanctifieth and giveth life.

There is a wide difference between the simplest man who has come to know the Lord by the Holy Spirit and even a very great man ignorant of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

There is a big distinction between merely believing that God exists, seeing Him in nature or in the Scriptures, and knowing the Lord by the Holy Spirit.

The spirit of the man who has learned to know God by the Holy Spirit burns day and night with love of God, and his soul can form no earthly attachment.

The soul that has not known the sweetness of the Holy Spirit rejoices in worldly vanity and praise, or in riches or power; but the Lord is the only desire of the soul that has come to know the Lord through the Holy Spirit, and with her, riches and worldly fame count for naught.

The soul that has tasted of the Holy Spirit recognises the taste. 'O taste and see that the Lord is good,' sang the Psalmist.ⁱⁱ David's was the knowledge of experience, and to this day the Lord gives His servants to know His goodness through experience, and will so teach His servants till the end of time.

The man who has come to know God by the Holy Spirit has learned humility of Him, and become like to His Master, Christ the Son of God, and is fashioned in His image.

O Lord, vouchsafe unto us the gift of Thy holy humility.
O Lord, give us freely of Thy humble Holy Spirit, just as Thou didst freely come to save Thy people, and raise them to heaven that they might behold Thy glory.

ⁱⁱ. Ps. xxxiv:8.

O Christ-like humility! I know thee but cannot attain unto thee! Thy fruits are sweet for they are not of this earth.

When the soul is downcast, how can the fire be kindled that will cause her to burn with love at all times? This fire is in God's hands, and the Lord came down upon earth to give us this fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the man who is learning to be humble possesses this fire, for the Lord endows the lowly soul with His grace.

Great pains are needed, and many tears must be shed, to preserve the humble spirit of Christ; but without it the light of life is extinguished and the soul dies. The body may soon be made lean by fasting but it is not easy or possible in a short space of time to subdue the soul so that she is constantly humble. For seventeen years St. Mary of Egypt wrestled with the passions, as with wild beasts, and only after that did she find peace; but her body was soon brought low – in the desert there was not even food for her to eat.

Our hearts are frozen cold and we have no understanding of Christ's humility or love. True, this humility and love are made known through the grace of the Holy Spirit, but we do not believe it possible to draw this grace to ourselves. To do so, we must desire it with our very soul. But how can I desire something of which I have no idea? All of us have some small idea of grace, and the Holy Spirit moves every soul to seek God.

O, how needful it is that we entreat the Lord to give the soul His humble Holy Spirit! The lowly soul enjoys great peace, while the proud soul is a torment to herself. The proud man does not know the love of God, and is far from Him. He is proud of being rich or learned or famous, but, alas, he is unaware of his own poverty and ruin, for he does not know God. But the man who struggles against pride, the Lord will help to overcome this passion.

The Lord said, 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in

heart.ⁱⁱⁱ Wherefore my soul wearies day and night, and I beseech God and all the Saints in heaven, and all you who have come to know the humility of Christ – pray for me. Pray that the lowly spirit of Christ, for which my soul weeps in longing, may descend on me. I could not do otherwise than long for this humility which my soul once knew by the Holy Spirit, but I lost this gift, and so my soul yearns after it in tears.

O Lord in Thy manifold mercy bestow on us
a humble spirit, that our souls may find rest in Thee.

Most holy and gracious Mother of God,
beseech God to make us lowly in spirit.

All ye Saints who dwell in heaven
and behold the glory of the Lord,
and your spirits rejoice—
pray that we also may be with you,
for my soul, too, would fain see the Lord,
and yearns after Him humbly,
knowing herself unworthy of such blessing.

O merciful Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit
teach us Thy humility.

Pride prevents the soul from setting out upon the path of faith. To the unbeliever I would give this counsel: Let him say, 'Lord, if Thou dost exist, then enlighten me and I will serve Thee with all my heart and soul.' And for such humility of mind and readiness to serve God, the Lord will of a certainty enlighten him. But do not say, 'If Thou dost exist, then punish me,' because if punishment should come, it may be that you would not find strength to thank God and offer repentance.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matt. xi:29.

And when the Lord enlightens you, your soul will feel the Lord, will feel that the Lord has forgiven you and loves you. And this you will come to know of experience, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will bear witness in your soul to your salvation, and you will want to cry aloud to the whole world, 'How greatly the Lord loveth us!'

Before he knew the Lord, Paul the Apostle persecuted Him, but when he came to know Him he travelled the length and breadth of the earth, preaching Christ.

Unless the Lord grant him knowledge in the Holy Spirit, man cannot know how greatly He loves us, for there is no earthly science can teach the human mind of the love the Lord has for men.

But to be saved, we must humble ourselves, for the proud man even were he to be set down in paradise would not find peace there but would be discontent, and say, 'Why am I not up in the front rank?' But the humble soul is filled with love and does not seek to be in the foreground. The humble soul wishes good to all men, and in all things is content.

The vainglorious either fear evil spirits or themselves resemble evil spirits. But we should not fear evil spirits – we should fear vainglory and pride, for through them is grace lost.

The man who converses with evil spirits defiles his mind, while the man who dwells in prayer is enlightened of the Lord.

The Lord loves us greatly, yet we fall because we lack humility. If we would preserve humility, we must mortify the flesh and assume the Spirit of Christ. The Saints waged bitter war against evil spirits and conquered them through humility, prayer and fasting.

He who has humbled himself has vanquished his foes.

What must we do to have peace in soul and body?

We must love every man like our own self, and at all times be prepared for death. When the soul is mindful of

death she becomes humble and yields herself up to the will of God, desiring to live in peace and love with all men.

When the peace of Christ enters the soul, then is she glad to sit like Job among the ashes and behold others in glory; then does the soul rejoice that she is worse than everyone else. This mystery of Christ-like humility is a great mystery, impossible to unfold. From love the soul wishes every human being more good than she wishes for herself, and delights when she sees others happier, and grieves to see them suffering.

O pray for me all ye Saints and all ye peoples,
that Christ's holy humility may come to me!

The Lord loves mankind but He sends affliction that we may perceive our weakness and humble ourselves, and for this humility receive the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit all things are good, all things are joyful, all things are well.

One man may suffer much from poverty and sickness but does not humble himself and so his suffering profits him nothing. Whereas another who humbles himself will be content with every kind of fate, since the Lord is his riches and his joy, and all men will wonder at the beauty of his soul.

You may say, My troubles are manifold. But I tell you, or, better, the Lord Himself says, 'Humble thyself, and thou wilt see, even to thine own astonishment, that thine adversities will be transformed into peace, and thou wilt exclaim: "Wherefore did I so torment and fret myself!" ' But now you rejoice, for you have humbled yourself, and the grace of God has come to you. Now were you to sit alone in poverty, your joy will not forsake you, inasmuch as in your soul is that peace of which the Lord said, 'My peace I give unto you.'^{iv} Thus to every humble soul the Lord gives peace.

^{iv}. John xiv:27.

The soul of the humble man is like the sea. Throw a stone into the sea – for a moment it will ruffle the surface, and then sink to the bottom.

Thus do afflictions disappear down in the heart of the humble man because the strength of the Lord is with him.

Where is thy habitation, O humble soul? And who dwells in thee; and to what shall I liken thee?

Thou burnest bright like the sun, and art not consumed, but with thy warmth thou givest warmth to all.

The earth is thine, for the meek shall inherit the earth, said the Lord.^v

Thou art like a flowering garden. In the heart of the garden lies a fair dwelling wherein it pleases the Lord to take up His abode.

Thou art the beloved of heaven and earth.

The Apostles, Prophets, Prelates and holy Fathers love thee.

The Angels, the Seraphim and Cherubim love thee.

The most holy Mother of the Lord loves thee, O humble soul.

The Lord loves thee, and in thee does He rejoice.

The Lord does not manifest Himself to the proud soul. All the books in the world will not help the proud soul to know the Lord, for her pride will not make way for the grace of the Holy Spirit, and God is known only through the Holy Spirit.

Enlightened by baptism, people believe in God. But there are some who even know Him. To believe in God is good but it is more blessed to know God. Nevertheless, those who believe are blessed, too, as the Lord said to Thomas, one of the twelve: 'Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.'^{vi}

If we were humble, the Lord in His love would shew us

^v. Matt. v:5.

^{vi}. John xx:29.

all things, would reveal to us all mysteries, but our trouble is that we are not humble. We puff ourselves up and boast over trifles, and so make both ourselves and others unhappy.

The Lord, though He is merciful, oppresses the soul with hunger on account of her pride, and withholds grace from her until she has learned humility. I was perishing from my sins, and would long ago have been in hell, had not the Lord and His most holy and blessed Mother taken pity on me. O, her quiet, gentle voice! A voice from heaven, the like of which we shall never hear on earth! And so now in tears I write of the Lord of Mercy, as He were my own Father. It is sweet for the soul to be with the Lord: Adam tasted the sweetness of this bliss in paradise when he saw the Lord with open eyes, and we feel in our souls that He is with us according to His promise: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'^{vii}

The Lord is with us. What more could we desire? The Lord created man that we might live and bask in Him for ever – that we might be with Him and in Him. And the Lord desires to be with us Himself, and in us. The Lord is our joy and gladness, and when pride causes us to withdraw from Him, it means that of our own accord we deliver ourselves up to suffering. Anguish of heart, dejection and evil thoughts lacerate us.

O Lord, set us right, as a tender mother corrects her little children. Give every soul to know the joy of Thy coming, the power of Thy help.
Refresh the suffering souls of Thy people,
and teach us all to know Thee in the Holy Spirit.
The soul of man languishes on earth, O Lord,
unable to find strength in Thee through the mind
because she does not know Thee and Thy goodness.
The cares of this world overshadow our minds,
and we cannot comprehend the fulness of Thy love.

^{vii}. Matt. xxviii:20.

Do Thou enlighten us.
 To Thy compassion all things are possible.
 Thou didst proclaim in Thy Holy Gospel
 that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God . . .
 and shall live.^{viii.}
 Make our dead souls to hear Thy voice this day,
 and come to life.
 Tell the world, O Lord: 'The sins of all men are forgiven,'
 and they will be forgiven.
 Hallow us, O Lord,
 and all men will be made holy by Thy Spirit,
 and all Thy peoples will glorify Thee on earth,
 and Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven,
 for to Thee all things are possible.

The proud man fears obloquy, while the humble man cares nothing. He who has acquired Christ-like humility will ever upbraid himself, and it rejoices him to be abused, and grieves him to be acclaimed. But this humility is still only elementary – when the soul comes to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit, how humble and meek He is, she sees herself as the worst of all sinners, and is happy to sit in shabby raiment in the ashes like Job, while she beholds other men in the Holy Spirit shining in the likeness of Christ.

May the Merciful Lord give all men to savour Christ's humility which passes description. The soul will then know no further desire but will live for ever in humility, love and lowliness.

My soul yearns after Thee, O Lord: Thou hast concealed Thy countenance from me, and I am troubled. My soul aches to behold Thee afresh, for Thou hast drawn my soul to Thee. Hadst Thou, O Lord, not drawn me by Thy grace, I could not thus yearn after Thee, and seek Thee with tears.

How should a man seek that which he has not known, which he has not lost?

^{viii.} John v:25.

When I lived in the world I would think of Thee – though not all the time – but now my spirit burns till I weep with desire to see Thee, my Light.

Thou hast taught me by Thy tender mercy. Thou hast hid Thyself from me that my soul learn humility, for without humility grace is not preserved in the soul, and weariness and despair oppress the soul. But when the soul has learned humility, neither despair nor affliction can approach, because the Spirit of God rejoices her and she is glad.

My heart is heavy for poor folk who do not know God. They take pride in being able to fly; but there is nothing wonderful in that – birds fly and glorify God. Yet man, God's creation, forsakes his Creator. But consider – how will you stand on the Day of Judgment? Whither will you flee, and where will you hide from the Face of God?

I pray God constantly for you, that you may all be saved and rejoice eternally with the Angels and Saints. And of you I beg this: Repent and humble yourselves, make glad the Lord Who awaits you with longing and mercy. The Lord causes the soul whom He cherishes to grieve for mankind, and so pray with tears; and my soul aches, and I pray much for you.

Glory be to the Lord and to His compassion for that by the Holy Spirit He maketh Himself manifest to us His sinful servants, and the soul knows Him better than her own father, in that we see our fathers from without but the Holy Spirit permeates the whole soul, and the mind and body.

Blessed is the humble soul: she is beloved of the Lord.

All heaven and earth exalt the humble Saints, and the Lord grants them the glory of being with Him. 'Where I am, there shall also my servant be.'^{ix}

The humility of the Mother of God is greater than any, wherefore all generations on earth exalt her, and all the

^{ix}. John xii:26.

heavenly hosts serve her; and this His Mother the Lord has given us to intercede for us and be our help.

There is no better way than to live in humility and love. The soul then knows a great peace within her, and will not set herself above her neighbour. If we love our enemies, there will be no place in our souls for pride, for in Christ-like love no one ranks above another. Pride like a burning fire consumes all that is good, whereas the humility of Christ passes description and is sweet. Did men but know this, the whole world would be apprenticed to this science. Day and night, all my life long, have I striven after humility, yet am I not able to prevail. My soul ever reflects: I have not attained to that which I desire, I cannot rest, but I humbly entreat you, brethren, you who know the love of Christ – pray for me, that I may be delivered from the spirit of pride, that the humility of Christ take up her abode in me.

There are many kinds of humility. One man is obedient, and has nothing but blame for himself; and this is humility. Another repents him of his sins and considers himself loathsome in the sight of God – and that is humility. But there is still another humility in the man who has known the Lord in the Holy Spirit. He who has known the Lord in the Holy Spirit has a different understanding and a different perception.

When the soul by the Holy Spirit sees the Lord, how meek and lowly He is, she humbles herself thoroughly. And this is an especial humility. No one can describe it, and it is made known only through the Holy Spirit. And were men to understand through the Holy Spirit what a Lord is ours, all would be transformed – the rich would despise their riches, scholars their learning, and rulers their glory and power. Every man would humble himself and live in profound peace and love, and there would be great joy on earth.

When the soul has given herself up to the will of God, the

mind then contains naught save God, and the soul stands before God with a pure mind.

O Lord, teach us by Thy Holy Spirit to be obedient and sober.

Give us Adam's spirit of repentance.

Give us tears to weep for our sins.

Give us to praise and thank Thee world without end.

Thou didst give us Thy most holy Body and Blood, that we might live with Thee for all eternity, and be where Thou art, and behold Thy glory.

O Lord, grant all the peoples of the earth to know how greatly thou lovest us, and the wondrous life Thou dost prepare for them that believe on Thee.

IV

On Peace

All men desire peace but they do not know how to attain it. Paissius the Great, having lost his temper, begged the Lord to deliver him from irritability. The Lord appeared to him, and said, 'Paissius, if thou dost wish to avoid anger – desire naught, neither judge nor hate any man, and then thou wilt have no anger.' Thus everyone who renounces his own will before God and other people will always be at peace in his soul; but the man who likes to have his own way will never know peace.

The soul who has surrendered herself to the will of God bears every affliction, every ill, with ease, because in times of sickness she prays and contemplates God, saying, 'O Lord, Thou seest my frailty. Thou knowest how weak and sinful I am. Help me to endure my sufferings, and to thank Thee for Thy goodness.' And the Lord relieves her pain, and the soul feels God's help, and is glad in the sight of God, and gives thanks.

If some misfortune befall you, reflect in this wise: 'The Lord sees my heart, and if He so will, all will be well both for me and others,' and then your soul will always be at peace. But if a man murmurs against his fate, saying, 'This is not right, and that is ill,' he will never know peace in his soul, even though he fast and spend much time in prayer.

The Apostles were deeply attached to the will of God. In this manner is peace preserved. All the great Saints likewise bore with every affliction, submitting themselves to the will of God.

The Lord loves us, and therefore we need have no fear

except of sin, for through sin we lose grace, and without God's grace the enemy will harass the soul as the wind harasses smoke or a dry leaf.

We must never for a moment forget that the enemy himself fell through pride, and now is always striving to thrust us on to the same path, and with many he has succeeded. But the Lord said, 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'ⁱ

O Merciful Lord, grant us Thy peace,
as Thou didst give peace to the Holy Apostles,
'My peace I give unto you.'ⁱⁱ
Lord, grant that we also may delight in Thy peace.
The Holy Apostles received Thy peace,
and spread it over the whole world,
and in saving people they did not lose their peace,
nor did it grow less in them.

Glory be to the Lord and His compassion – He loveth us greatly, and giveth us His peace and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

How may we preserve peace of soul among the temptations of our times?

Judging by the Scriptures and the temper of folk today, we are living through the final period. Yet must we still preserve our souls' peace, without which – as St. Seraphim said, who upheld Russia by his prayer – we cannot be saved. During his lifetime the Lord preserved Russia because of his prayer; and after St. Seraphim another pillar reached up from earth to heaven – Father John of Kronstadt. Let us pause and consider Father John of Kronstadt, for he was of our day, we witnessed his prayers, whereas the others we did not know.

ⁱ. Matt. xi:29.

ⁱⁱ. John xiv:27.

We remember how when his carriage was brought round after the Liturgy, and he stepped into it to take his seat, people surged about him, seeking his blessing; and in all the hurly-burly his soul remained wrapt in God. His attention was not distracted in the midst of the crowd and he did not lose his peace of soul. How did he manage this? That is our question.

He achieved this and was not distracted because he loved the people and never ceased praying to the Lord for them.

O Lord, grant Thy peace to Thy people.

O Lord, bestow Thy Holy Spirit on Thy servants,
that their hearts may be kindled by Thy love,
and their feet set upon the path of truth and goodness.

O Lord, I would that Thy peace be among all Thy people
whom Thou hast loved to the utmost,
and didst give Thine only-begotten Son
that the world might be saved.

O Lord, grant them Thy grace that in peace and love
they may come to know and love Thee,
and say like the Apostles on Mount Tabor,
'Master, it is good for us to be with Thee.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Just as Father John of Kronstadt preserved his peace of soul by praying for the people without cease, so we lose our peace because we do not love the people of God. The Holy Apostles and all the Saints desired the salvation of the world, and dwelling among men they prayed ardently for them. The Holy Spirit gave them the strength to love mankind. As for us, if we love not our brother we cannot have peace.

Let every man think on this.

Glory be to God that He has not left us comfortless^{iv} but gave us the Holy Spirit on earth. The Holy Spirit teaches the soul ineffable love for mankind, and compassion for all

ⁱⁱⁱ. Mark ix:5; Luke ix:33.

^{iv}. John xiv:18.

who have gone astray. The Lord had pity on them that had gone astray, and sent His only-begotten Son to save them; and the Holy Spirit teaches this same compassion towards those who have erred, who go to hell. But he who does not possess the Holy Spirit has no wish to pray for his enemies.

St. Paissius the Great prayed for his disciple who had denied Christ, and while he prayed, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'Paissius, for whom dost thou pray? Knowest thou not that he denied me?' But the Saint continued to weep for his disciple, and the Lord then said to him, 'Paissius, thou hast become like unto me in thy love.'

After this fashion is peace acquired, and there is no other way.

Though a man pray much, and fast, but has not love for his enemies he can know no peace of soul. And I should not even be able to speak of this, had not the Holy Spirit taught me love.

The soul that is sinful and a prey to the passions cannot know peace and rejoice in the Lord, even though she possess all the riches of the earth, even though she rule over the whole world. If a great king, merrily feasting with his princes, and sitting on the throne of his glory, were suddenly to be informed, 'O King, thou art about to die,' his soul would be troubled, and would tremble with fear, and he would see his infirmity.

Yet how many poor men there are, who are rich only in their love for God and who on being told that they were about to die would reply in peace, 'The Lord's will be done. Glory be to the Lord that He has remembered me, and wants to take me to paradise where the first to enter was the thief.'

There are poor men who have no fear but meet death in peace, like Simeon the Just, who lifted up his voice in praise and sang, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.'^v

^v Luke ii:29.

Only those with the peace of God in their souls, or who have at least experienced it, can understand the peace that was in the soul of Simeon the Just. Speaking of this peace, the Lord said to His disciples, 'My peace I give unto you.'^{vi} The man who possesses this peace departs in peace into eternal life, with the cry:

'Glory be to Thee, O Lord, that now I go to Thee, and in peace and love I shall behold Thy countenance for ever. Thy meek and gentle gaze drew my soul to Thee, and she yearns after Thee.'

We must expound to our brethren gently and with love. Peace is lost if we vaunt or exalt ourselves above our brother, if we find fault, if we enlighten otherwise than gently and with love; if we eat too much, or are indolent in our praying. All these things cause us to lose peace.

But if we accustom ourselves to praying eagerly for our enemies, and loving them, peace will always dwell in our souls; whereas if we feel hatred towards our brethren, or find fault with them, our minds will be clouded and we shall lose our peace and the confidence to pray to God.

The soul cannot know peace if she does not explore God's law day and night, for this law was written by the Spirit of God, and from the Scriptures the Divine Spirit passes into the soul, and the soul feels the delight and loveliness thereof, and no longer wants to love earthly things, for love of earthly things ravages the soul, until she grows despondent and unkempt, and has no wish to pray to God. Then the enemy, seeing that the soul is not in God, causes her to vacillate, and, unrestricted, he can instil what he will in the mind. The soul is then hustled from one set of thoughts to another, so that she spends the whole day in this confusion, and is unable to contemplate God with a single mind.

^{vi} John xiv:27.

The man who carries the peace of the Holy Spirit in his heart spreads peace around him, too; but he who has a malevolent spirit in him spreads evil.

Query: How can one in authority preserve peace if those under him are disobedient?

It is difficult and distressing for him but he should remember that though they are rebellious, still the Lord loves them, and suffered and died for their salvation. He must pray fervently for them, and the Lord will give prayer to him who prays. And he of experience will know the assurance and love for God that comes to the mind, and although he be a sinful man the Lord will give him to taste of the fruits of prayer, and if he accustoms himself to pray thus for those under him, his soul will know deep peace and love.

Query: How can a subordinate preserve peace of mind if the man he works for is bad-tempered and malicious?

A man who is bad-tempered is himself suffering at the hands of an evil spirit. He is suffering because of his pride. His subordinate should realise this and pray for the sick soul of his superior. Then the Lord, seeing the subordinate's patience, will grant him forgiveness of his sins, and prayer without cease. It is a great thing in the sight of God to pray for those who hurt our feelings and injure us; and for this the Lord will accord us grace, and by the Holy Spirit we shall come to know the Lord, and bear every affliction with joy for His sake, and the Lord will give us love for all the world, and we shall ardently desire the good of all men, and pray for all as for our own soul.

The Lord bade us love our enemies, and the man who loves his enemies is like to the Lord. But we can only love our enemies by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and so as soon as anyone affronts you, pray to God for him, and then you will preserve peace in your soul, and the grace of God. But if you murmur and inveigh against your superior, you will

become as irritable as he is, and the words of the prophet David will be fulfilled in you: 'With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.'^{vii.}

Likewise, it is difficult for the novice to preserve peace if his *staretz* is bad-tempered. To live with a bad *staretz* is a great cross for a novice: he must pray for him, and then his own peace of mind and body will be preserved. But if it is you who are the superior, and have to sit in judgment on someone for doing wrong, pray to the Lord to give you a tender heart, which the Lord loves, and your judgment will then be sound; but if you judge purely according to deeds, there will be errors in your judgment, and you will not be pleasing to the Lord.

The purpose of judgment must be that the one you are judging should mend his ways, and you must be compassionate with every soul, every created being, and in all things preserve a clear conscience yourself. Then deep peace will reign in mind and soul. Let us live in peace and love, and then the Lord will hear us, and give us whatever we ask for that is profitable.

Where there is love – there is the Holy Spirit. We are told this in the Scriptures, and experience proves it so.

Peace in our souls is impossible unless we beg the Lord with all our hearts to give us love for all men. The Lord knew that if we did not love our enemies, we should have no peace of soul, and so He gave us the commandment, 'Love your enemies.' Unless we love our enemies, we shall only now and then be easy, as it were, in our souls; but if we love our enemies, peace will dwell in us day and night.

Guard the peace of the grace of the Holy Spirit in your soul. Do not lose it over petty trifles. If you give peace to your brother, the Lord will give you incomparably more,

^{vii.} Ps. xviii:26.

whereas if you injure him, affliction will inevitably befall your soul.

If a dissolute thought comes into your mind, drive it off at once, and you will preserve your peace of soul. But if you harbour it, your soul will lose her love for God, and you will no longer have confidence to pray.

If you renounce your own will, then you have conquered the enemy and your reward will be peace of soul; but if you cling to your own will, you are already vanquished by the enemy, and despondency will torment your soul.

The man who is covetous cannot love God and his neighbour. His heart and mind are intent on riches. The spirit of repentance is not in him, nor will he have a contrite heart, and his soul cannot know the sweetness of the peace of Christ.

The soul that has known the Lord wants to see him within her at all times, for the Lord enters the soul in quietness and gives her peace, and bears silent witness to salvation.

If the kings and rulers of the nations knew the love of God, they would never make war. War happens to us for our sins, not because of our love. The Lord created us in His love, and bade us live in love, and glorify Him.

If those in high places kept the commandments of the Lord, and we obeyed them in humility, there would be great peace and gladness on earth, whereas now the whole universe suffers because of the ambition for power and absence of submission among the proud.

I pray Thee, O Merciful Lord,
let all mankind, from Adam to the end of time,
come to know Thee,
that Thou art good and merciful,
that all nations may rejoice in Thy peace,
and behold the light of Thy countenance.
Thy gaze is tranquil and meek
and draws the soul to Thee.

V

On Grace

I brought nothing but sins with me into the Monastery, and I do not know why, when I was still a young novice, the Lord gave me the grace of the Holy Spirit in such abundance that soul and body, I was filled with this grace, like unto the grace of the Martyrs, and my body longed to suffer for Christ.

I did not ask the Lord for the Holy Spirit – I did not know about the Holy Spirit and how He enters the soul, nor what He does with the soul; but now it is a great joy for me to write of this.

O Holy Spirit, how dear art Thou to the soul! To describe Thee is impossible but the soul is sensible of Thy coming, and Thou givest peace to the mind and delight to the heart.

The Lord said, 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'ⁱ The Lord is speaking here of the Holy Spirit, for in the Holy Spirit alone does the soul find perfect rest.

Blessed are we Orthodox Christians in that the Lord loves us dearly and accords us the grace of the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit gives us to behold His glory. But to preserve grace we must love our enemies, and offer thanks to God for all our afflictions.

There was a sinful soul that the Lord summoned to repentance, and this soul turned to the Lord and He in His mercy received her and shewed Himself to her. The Lord is merciful

ⁱ Matt. xi: 29.

beyond measure, and lowly and meek. Of His great goodness He remembered not her sins, and the soul loved Him unto the end, and now strains towards Him as a bird in a cramped cage strains towards the green grove.

The soul of this man came to know God, God the merciful, the bountiful, the all-lovely, and was filled with love for Him, and in the great fire of her love reaches out insatiably towards Him, for the grace of the Lord is exceeding sweet, and warms the mind and the heart and the whole feeble body.

And on a sudden the soul loses this grace of the Lord; and when this happens she reflects, 'I must have offended my Lord, I will entreat His mercy. It may be He will grant me that grace again, for my soul no longer desires aught in this world, save the Lord.' The love of the Lord is such a burning love that the soul that has once tasted thereof has no other desire; and if she loses this love, or if grace decreases, *what* prayers she pours out then before God in her hunger to possess His grace again! When he realised that he had lost grace, St. Seraphim knelt on bare stone, day and night for three years, because his soul had come to know the Lord and had delighted in His grace, and loved Him beyond bounds.

The soul that has come to know the Lord is drawn by love to Him, and the ardour of her love for God will not let her forget Him by day or by night for a single second. And if our souls so ardently reach out toward the Lord, though we love Him so feebly, who shall describe the fulness of the love of the Mother of God for her Son and her God?

'Speak to us, O most pure Mother of God,
and tell us how thou didst love thy Son and thy Lord,
and of thy prayers when thy Son ascended into heaven!'

This is something we cannot apprehend.

Blessed is the soul that preserves purity of mind and body.

The Lord loves her and gives her the grace of the Holy Spirit, and this grace constrains her so to love God that from sweetness of the Holy Spirit she cannot tear herself from Him and, insatiable, stretches towards Him, for the love of God knows no end. I say 'insatiable', though I know a man whom the Merciful Lord visited with His grace, and had the Lord asked him, 'Wouldst thou have more grace?', his soul in the weakness of his body would have replied, 'Lord, Thou seest – if Thou dost give me more, I shall not be able to bear it, and I shall die.' Man cannot bear the fulness of grace. Hence on Mount Tabor Christ's disciples 'fell on their face'ⁱⁱ before the glory of the Lord.

Every day we feed the body and breathe in air that it may live. But what the soul needs is the Lord and the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which the soul is dead. As the sun warms and gives life to the flowers of the field, and they reach up to it, so the soul that loves God is drawn towards Him and basks in Him, and in her great joy would have all men equally happy. For this did the Lord create us, that in heaven we might dwell eternally with Him in love.

Glory be to God and His compassion! He so loved us that He gave us the Holy Spirit Who teaches us all good things, and gives us strength to vanquish sin. The Lord in His great mercy gives us grace, and we must hold fast to this grace, lest we lose it, for without grace man is spiritually blind. Blind is he who accumulates riches in this world; which means that his soul does not know the Holy Spirit, does not know how sweet He is, and so is captivated by the earth. But he who has known the sweetness of the Holy Spirit knows that it is beyond compare, and there is naught on earth can charm him, for he is held in thrall by love of the Lord alone, and finds rest in God, and rejoices, and weeps with pity for mankind, because all men have not come to know the Lord.

ⁱⁱ Matt. xviii: 6.

When the soul is in the Holy Spirit she is content and does not weary after the things of heaven, for the Kingdom of God is within us: the Lord has come and taken up His abode in us. But when the soul loses grace, she longs for what is of heaven and seeks the Lord with tears.

Until the advent of grace man lives his life and thinks that all is well and prosperous with his soul; but when grace visits him and dwells with him he sees himself quite otherwise, and it is only when he loses grace again that he realises his unhappy state.

The king's son went far afield to hunt, and getting lost in the depths of the forest could not find his way back to the palace. Many were the tears he shed as he sought the path in vain. Trapped in the wild woods, he was heart-sick for his father the king and his mother the queen, for his brothers and sisters. How should he, a king's son, exist in the wild depths of the forest? And the king's son wept bitterly for his old life in his father's palace, and longed grievously for his mother.

Thus, and even more, does the soul yearn and mourn when she loses grace.

When the sons of Jacob sold their fair young brother into slavery to the Egyptians in an alien and distant land, Joseph wept inconsolably for his father; and when he saw his mother Rachel's grave he shed bitter tears, saying: 'Seest thou, O mother mine, how they lead me into bondage in an alien land?'

Thus, and even more, does the soul which has lost the grace of the Holy Spirit suffer and ache as she is led into bondage by evil thoughts.

But he who does not know grace seeks it not. Thus men have attached themselves to the earth, and do not see that nothing in this world can make up for the sweetness of the Holy Spirit.

A country cock lives in a small yard and is content with its lot. But the eagle flies up under the clouds and beholds

the blue horizons, knows many lands, has seen forest and meadow, rivers and mountain, sea and city; and if you were to clip his wings and put him to live with the cock in the farmyard – O how he would pine for the blue sky and the crags of the desert!

Thus is it with the soul that has known grace and lost it: she is inconsolable in her grief, and nowhere can she find rest.

The Lord did not ‘leave us comfortless,’ as a dying mother leaves her orphaned children, but gave us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit,ⁱⁱⁱ and He draws us to love God with an insatiable love, and to yearn after Him and seek Him day and night with tears.

O how ill it goes with the soul when she loses love and assurance! In sadness of heart she raises her cry to God: ‘When shall I see the Lord again, and rejoice in His peace and love?’

Why art thou cast down, O my soul^{iv} and why dost thou shed tears? Is it that thou hast forgotten what the Lord has done for thee who dost deserve every punishment?

No, I have not forgotten how great was the mercy the Lord poured upon me, and I remember the sweetness of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and know the love of the Lord and how sweet this love is for soul and body.

Why dost thou weep, O my soul, if thou dost know the Lord and His ineffable love for thee? What more dost thou want of thy Master, Who has manifested such great mercy toward thee?

My soul desires never to lose the grace of the Lord, for the sweetness thereof draws my soul without cease to love her Creator.

When the soul falls away from grace, she entreats the Lord

ⁱⁱⁱ. John xiv: 16–18.

^{iv}. Ps. xlii: 11.

again for the mercy she once knew. The soul is harassed and torn by evil thoughts, and she turns for protection to the Lord, her Creator, and beseeches Him to grant her a humble spirit, so that grace shall not forsake the soul but give her strength to love her Heavenly Father without cease.

The Lord removes His grace from the soul and thus in His mercy and wisdom does He school the soul for whose sake His arms were stretched upon the cross in great suffering, that she might be humble. He allows the soul to shew forth her intent in the struggle with the enemy but the soul of herself is powerless to vanquish him; and so my soul is sorrowful and longs for the Lord, and seeks Him in tears.

O Lord, Thou seest how weak is my soul without Thy grace,
and nowhere at rest. Do Thou, our delight, our Heavenly Father,
give us strength to love Thee.
Give us Thy holy fear in which the Cherubim tremble
and love Thee.

Thou art our Light, enlightening the soul
to love Thee with an insatiable love.
Thou takest from me Thy grace
because my soul does not ever dwell in humility,
but Thou seest mine affliction, and I entreat Thee,
give me Thy humble Holy Spirit.

Man of himself is powerless to fulfil God's commandments, wherefore is it said, 'Ask, and it shall be given you.'^v And if we do not ask, we torment ourselves and deprive ourselves of the grace of the Holy Spirit; and without grace many things perplex the soul because she does not comprehend the will of God.

^v Matt. vii: 7; Luke xi: 9.

To possess grace a man must be temperate in all things – in his gestures, in speech, in what he lets his eyes look upon, in his thoughts, in the food he eats. And every form of temperance is furthered by meditation in the word of God.^{vi} It is written, ‘Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.’^{vii}

St. Mary of Egypt took a few grains of wheat from the hands of St. Zossima and said, ‘That is enough with the grace of God.’ We must train ourselves to eat as little as possible, yet within reason, as our work permits. After meals we should feel like praying – that is the measure of moderation.

The Lord loves us more than a mother loves her children, and gives freely of the grace of the Holy Spirit, but we must preserve this grace with all our might, for there is no greater grief than to lose it. When the soul loses grace she is sorely afflicted and reflects thus: ‘I must have offended my Master.’ In these painful moments it is as if the soul had fallen from heaven to earth and beholds all the sorrows of the world. O, how the soul then beseeches the Lord to grant her His grace again! There are no words to describe this longing for God. The soul that has tasted of the sweetness of the Holy Spirit is unable to forget, and thirsts day and night, and reaches out, insatiable, towards God. Who shall tell of the burning love for God of the soul that has come to perceive Him as her Heavenly Father? She knows not a moment’s content on earth until the Lord gives her His grace.

The soul that has lost grace yearns after the Lord, and weeps as Adam wept when he was driven from paradise. And no one can afford her consolation, save God. Adam wept great tears and they ran down in torrents, wetting his countenance, his bosom and the earth beneath his feet; and he fetched deep, powerful sighs like the bellows in a

^{vi}. cf. Ps. 1: 2.

^{vii}. Deut. viii: 3

smithy. 'Lord, Lord,' he lamented, 'take me into paradise again.'

Adam's soul was perfect in the love of God, and he knew the sweetness of paradise, but his soul was unpractised, and he did not resist when Eve tempted him, as the sorely-afflicted Job resisted when tempted by his wife.^{viii.}

What is thy desire, O my soul, and why dost thou sorrow and shed tears?

I mourn for the Lord that I have not seen this long while, and no one can comfort my grieving after Him. He gave me to know His mercy, and I would have Him abide in me forever.

A mother weeps for her beloved son when she has not seen him for a long time, saying, 'Where art thou, beloved fruit of my womb?' But a mother's love is as naught beside the love of God, so great and insatiable is this love.

When the soul is full of the love of God, out of *infinite joy* she sorrows and in tears prays for the whole world, that all men may come to know their Lord and heavenly Father. There is no rest for her, nor does she desire rest, until all mankind delights in the grace of His love.

My soul yearns after Thee and cannot find Thee. Thou seest, O Lord, how my soul is drawn to Thee, and weeps as she seeks Thy grace. Thou wast pleased to give me Thy grace, and again Thou wast pleased to take it from me. When I knew it not, I could not entreat Thee so. How could I ask for that which I knew not? But now I entreat Thee because my soul has known Thee and delighted in Thy Holy Spirit, and loved Thee, her Creator.

Thou didst give Thy grace to Thy Saints, and they loved Thee beyond measure, and shrank from all earthly things, for the sweetness of Thy love will not admit of attachment

^{viii.} Job ii: 9-10.

to the earth and the beauty of this world, which is as naught compared with Thy grace.

O, how infirm is my soul, lacking strength to fly up to the Lord and stand before Him in humility, and weep day and night. The soul that has known God, her Creator and Heavenly Father, can have no rest on earth. And the soul thinks to herself, 'When I appear before the Lord, I shall entreat His mercy in all things, for the whole Christian race.' And she muses the while, 'When I behold His dear countenance, I shall be dumb with joy, for great love renders a man speechless.' And again she thinks, 'I will pray for the whole human race, that all people may turn to the Lord and find rest in Him, for Divine love desires salvation for all.'

Preserve the grace of God: with grace life is easy. With God all is well, all is pleasant and joyous, the soul is at peace in God and walks, as it were, in a fair garden where dwell the Lord and the Mother of God. Without grace man is but sinful clay, but with the grace of God the spirit of man is like unto an angel. The angels serve God and love Him in spirit. In this wise is man in spirit like unto an angel.

Blessed are they who are concerned day and night to please the Lord and become worthy of His love. By experience they will feel and know the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Grace does not steal upon the soul unawares, and when grace is lost the soul weeps and seeks it with longing. If parents lose a beloved child, they search for him everywhere. But the soul that loves God seeks the Lord with a deeper and more powerful longing, and has no thought for family and friends.

Glory be to the Lord that He gives us to discern the advent of grace, and teaches us to know wherefore grace comes, and wherefore is lost. He who keeps all the commandments will always feel grace present in his soul, be it only in small measure. But grace is easily lost through vanity, through a single arrogant thought. We may fast and pray much, do much good, but if with this we are puffed up we shall be

like drums that thunder but are hollow within. Vanity deals destruction to the soul, and much experience and prolonged struggle are required to vanquish it. In the Monastery I have learned by experience and from the Scriptures of the harm wrought by vanity, and now day and night I beseech the Lord for the humility of Christ. This is a great matter continually to be learned.

Fierce is the war we wage, yet it is a wise war and a simple one. If the soul grows to love humility, then all the snares of our enemies are undone and his fortresses captured. In this spiritual warfare of ours we must see to the state of our ammunition and provender. Our ammunition is our humility; our provender – the grace of God. If we lose these, the enemy will defeat us.

The war is a stubborn war, but only for the proud – the humble find it easy because they love the Lord, and He gives them the powerful armament of the grace of the Holy Spirit, of which our enemies are afraid, for it scorches them with fire.

Here now is the shortest and easiest way to salvation:

Be obedient and sober, do not find fault, and keep mind and heart from evil thoughts. Think that all men are good and beloved of the Lord. For such humility the grace of the Holy Spirit will dwell in you, and cause you to exclaim, 'How merciful is the Lord!'

But if you find fault and are querulous, if you want your own way, even if you pray much your soul will fail, and you will cry out, 'The Lord has forgotten me!' But it is not that the Lord has forgotten you – it is you who have forgotten that you must humble yourself, and so the grace of God abides not in your soul. Into the humble soul, now, this grace enters with ease, affording her peace and rest in God. The Mother of God was perfect humility, wherefore is she glorified in heaven and on earth; and every one who humbles himself will be glorified of God, and will behold the glory of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit is wondrous sweet and pleasing for soul and body. He gives us to know the love of God, and this love is of the Holy Spirit.

A wondrous thing – by the Holy Spirit man comes to know the Lord, his Creator; and blessed are they that serve Him, for He has said, ‘Where I am, there shall my servant be,’ and he shall ‘behold my glory.’^{ix}

And if it be so on earth, how much more do the Saints in heaven love the Lord in the Holy Spirit, and glorify Him: and this love is an unutterable love.

The soul that has known the Holy Spirit will understand this that I write of.

Why does the Lord so love us? We are all sinful men, and – in the words of St. John – ‘the whole world lieth in wickedness.’^x Why does He love us?

The Lord Himself is *all love*.

As the sun warms the whole earth, so the grace of the Holy Spirit fires the soul to love the Lord, and she yearns for Him and seeks Him in tears.

How could I not seek Thee? Inscrutable, Thou didst reveal Thyself to my soul, and enthralled her by Thy love, and the grace of the Holy Spirit ravished my soul, and she cannot forget.

How shall we forget the Lord, when He is within us? And the Apostles preached to the peoples, ‘May Christ be formed in you.’^{xi}

O if only the whole world knew the Lord and His love for us, and how sweet is this love, and how all the heavenly host lives by it, and how all things are set in motion by the Holy Spirit, and how the Lord is magnified for His sufferings, and how all the Saints glorify Him!

And there shall be no end to this glory.

^{ix} John xii: 26; xvii : 24

^x I John v: 19.

^{xi} cf. Gal. iv: 19.

The Lord rejoices in the soul that repents humbly, and gives her the grace of the Holy Spirit. I know of a certain novice who received the Holy Spirit after six months in the Monastery; others waited ten years, while still others wait forty or more years before knowing grace, but *no one* could retain this grace, because we are not humble.

St. Seraphim was seven and twenty years of age when he beheld the Lord, and his soul so loved God that from the sweetness of the Holy Spirit he was quite transformed; but later he went into the desert, and realising that *such* grace was not with him, for three years he knelt on the stones, crying, 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'

The soul that has come to know God through the Holy Spirit strains up to Him; the mercy of God tugs at her, and the world is forgotten. And when the soul remembers the world, her ardent desire is for all men to know God with her, and she prays for the whole world. The Holy Spirit Himself moves her to pray that all men may repent and know God, how merciful He is.

Let us humble ourselves, brethren, and the Lord will love us. That the Lord loves us, we know by the grace that He gives the soul. When there is grace in the soul, even in small measure, the soul loves the Lord and her fellow-men, and has peace within herself. But there is a greater love, and then the soul forgets the whole world.

Blessed is he who does not lose the grace of God but goes from strength to strength. (I lost the grace I knew but the Lord had pity on me and in His unique mercy gave me more grace.)

How infirm is the soul! Without God's grace we are like cattle, but with grace great is man in the sight of God.

Men set such store on earthly knowledge, and take pride in knowing the princes of this world, rejoicing if they can claim close acquaintanceship – but the truly great thing is to know the Lord and His will.

With all your might, brethren, humble your souls, that the Lord may love you and have mercy on you. But His grace will not be in us if we do not love our enemies.

By the Holy Spirit my soul came to know the Lord, and so it is pleasant and easy for me to think on Him and on the works of God; but without the Holy Spirit the soul has no life, even though she be informed with all the knowledge of the world.

If people only knew of the existence of spiritual wisdom, they would fling aside all their sciences and technics, to contemplate only the Lord. The beauty of the Lord captivates the soul, and she is drawn to Him, and her eternal and only desire is to dwell with Him. The soul then looks on all the kingdoms of the earth as clouds floating across the sky.

The Lord said, 'I am in the Father, and the Father in me,'^{xii.} and 'Ye are in me, and I in you.'^{xiii.} Our soul feels the Lord in us, and we cannot forget Him for a single moment.

What mercy is this – that the Lord desires us to be in Him and in the Father!

But what have we done for Thee, Lord,
in what have we pleased Thee,
that Thou dost wish to be in us, and for us to be in Thee?
We crucified Thee on the Cross with our sins,
yet dost Thou still wish us to be with Thee?
O, how great is Thy mercy! I see Thy mercy spread over
me.
I am deserving of hell and every torment,
yet dost Thou give me the grace of the Holy Spirit.

And if Thou didst vouchsafe to my sinful self
to know Thee by the Holy Spirit, then I beseech Thee,
O Lord, let all peoples come to know Thee.

^{xii.} John xiv: 11.

^{xiii.} John xiv: 20.

VI

On the Will of God and on Freedom

It is a great good to give oneself over to the Divine will. Then the Lord alone occupies the soul. No thought can enter in, and the soul, undistracted, prays to God, and is full of love for God even though the body be suffering.

When the soul is entirely given over to the will of God, the Lord Himself takes her in hand, and the soul learns directly from God; whereas, before, she turned to teachers and the Scriptures for instruction. But it rarely happens that the soul's Teacher is the Lord Himself through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and few there be that know of this, save only those who live according to God's will.

The proud man does not want to live according to God's will: he likes to be his own master, and does not see that man has not wisdom enough to guide himself without God. And I, when I lived in the world and as yet knew not the Lord and His Holy Spirit, nor how the Lord loves us – I relied on my own understanding. But when by the Holy Spirit I came to know our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, my soul submitted to God, and now I accept every affliction that befalls me, and say to myself, 'The Lord looks down on me, what is there to fear?' But before, I could not live after this manner.

Life is much easier for the man who is given over to the will of God, since in illness, in poverty and persecution, he reflects thus: 'Such is God's pleasure, and I must endure on account of my sins.'

Thus for many years have I suffered from headaches,

which are hard to bear but salutary because the soul is humbled through sickness. My soul longs to pray and keep vigil but sickness hinders me because of my body's demand for rest and quiet. And I besought the Lord to heal me but the Lord hearkened not. Which means that it would not have been salutary for me to have been cured.

Here is another thing that happened to me, when the Lord made haste to hearken unto me, and save me. We were given fish one feast-day in the refectory, and, while I was eating, a fish-bone found its way deep down my throat, and stuck in my chest. I called to the holy martyr St. Panteleimon, begging him to help me, as the doctor could not extract the bone. And when I spoke the word 'heal', my soul received this answer: 'Leave the refectory, breathe out, and you will bring the bone up, together with some blood.' This I did. I went out, exhaled, coughed, and a big bone came up, together with some blood. And I realised that if the Lord did not cure my headaches, it means they are good for my soul.

The most precious thing in the world is to know God and understand His will, even if only dimly.

The soul that has come to know God should in all things submit to His will, and live before Him in awe and love: in love, because the Lord is love; in awe, because we must go in fear of grieving God by some evil thought.

O LORD, by the power of the grace of the Holy Spirit
Vouchsafe that we may live according to Thy Holy Spirit.

When grace is with us, we are strong in spirit; but when we lose grace we see our infirmity – see that without God we cannot even think a good thing.

O God of mercy, Thou knowest our infirmity.
I beseech Thee, grant me a humble spirit,
for in Thy mercy Thou dost enable the humble soul

to live according to Thy will.
Thou dost reveal Thy mysteries to her.
Thou givest her to know Thee,
and the infinity of Thy love for us.

How are you to know if you are living according to the will of God?

Here is a sign: if you are distressed over anything, it means that you have not fully surrendered to God's will, although it may seem to you that you are living according to His will.

He who lives according to God's will has no material cares. If he has need of something, he offers himself and the thing to God; and if he does not receive it, he remains as unworried as if he had got what he wanted.

The soul that is given over to the will of God fears nothing – neither thunder nor thieves, *nor any other thing*. Come what may, 'Such is God's pleasure,' she says. If she falls sick, she thinks, 'This means that I need sickness, or God would not have sent it.'

And in this wise is peace preserved in soul and body.

The man who is concerned for his own welfare is unable to give himself over to God's will, that his soul may have peace in God. But the humble soul is devoted to God's will, and lives before Him in awe and love: in awe, lest she grieve God in any way; in love, because the soul has come to know how the Lord loves us.

The best thing of all is to surrender to God's will, and bear affliction with confidence in God. The Lord seeing our affliction will never give us too much to bear. If we seem to ourselves to be greatly afflicted, it means that we have not surrendered to the will of God.

The soul that is in all things devoted to the will of God rests tranquil in Him, for she knows of experience and from the

Holy Scriptures that the Lord loves us much and watches over our souls, quickening all things by His grace and love.

Nothing troubles the man who is given over to the will of God, be it illness, poverty, persecution. He knows that the Lord in His mercy is solicitous for us. The Holy Spirit, Whom the soul knows, is witness thereof. But the proud and self-willed do not want to surrender to God's will because they like their own way, and that is harmful for the soul.

Pimen the Great said, 'Our own will is like a wall of brass between us and God, preventing us from coming near to Him or contemplating His mercy.'★

We must always pray the Lord for peace of soul, that we may the more easily fulfil the Lord's commandments; for the Lord loves those who strive to do His will, and thus they attain profound peace in God.

He who does the Lord's will is content with all things, be he poor or sick and suffering, because the grace of God gladdens his heart. But the man who is discontented with his lot, and murmurs against his fate, or against those who cause him offence, should realise that his spirit is in a state of pride, which has taken from him his sense of gratitude towards God.

But if it be so with you, do not lose heart but try to trust firmly in the Lord, and ask Him for a humble spirit; and when the lowly spirit of God comes to you, you will then love Him and be at rest in spite of all afflictions.

The soul that has acquired humility is always mindful of God, and thinks to herself, 'God created me; He suffered for

★ cf. Bishop Brianchaninov, *Lives of the Fathers*: 'Abba Pimen said, "Man's will is a wall of brass between him and God. It is a stumbling stone." ' Staretz Silouan's words, 'preventing us from coming near to Him or contemplating His mercy' merely give the sense of what St. Pimen said. Similarly, in certain other instances Staretz Silouan's quotations are not always quite literal: rather, they interpret for us the meaning of the original.

me; He forgives me my sins and comforts me; He feeds me and cares for me. Why, then, should I take thought for myself, or what is there to fear even if death threaten me?’

The Lord enlightens every soul that has surrendered to the will of God, for He said: ‘Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.’ⁱ

A soul that is troubled about anything should inquire of the Lord, and the Lord will give understanding. But this primarily in times of calamity and bewilderment. As a general rule we should be advised by our spiritual father, for this is a humbler way.

It is good to learn to live according to the will of God. The soul then dwells unceasingly in God, and is serene and tranquil; and from fulness of joy man prays that every soul may know the Lord, know His great love for us, and how richly He gives us of the Holy Spirit, Who rejoices the soul in God.

And all things are then dear to the soul, for all things are of God.

The Lord in His mercy gives man to understand that he must suffer affliction with a grateful heart. My whole life long I have never once rebelled against affliction but accepted all things as physic from the hand of God, and I have ever offered up thanks to God, wherefore the Lord has enabled me to bear all afflictions lightly.

No one on this earth can avoid affliction; and although the afflictions which the Lord sends are not great, men imagine them beyond their strength and are upset by them. This is because they will not humble their souls and commit themselves to the will of God. But the Lord Himself guides with His grace them that are given over to God’s will, and they

ⁱ Ps.1:15.

bear all things with fortitude for the sake of God Whom they have so loved and with Whom they are glorified for ever.

It is impossible to escape affliction in this world but the man who is given over to the will of God bears affliction easily, aware of it but putting his trust in the Lord, and so his afflictions pass.

When the Mother of God stood at the foot of the Cross, the depth of her grief was *inconceivable*, for she loved her Son more than anyone can imagine. And we know that the greater the love, the greater the suffering. By the laws of human nature the Mother of God could not possibly have borne her affliction but she had submitted herself to the will of God, and the Holy Spirit sustained her and gave her strength to bear this affliction.

And later, after the Ascension of the Lord, she came to be a great comfort to all God's people in their distress.

The Lord gave us the Holy Spirit on earth, and the man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells feels paradise within him.

Perhaps you will say, 'Why is it I have not grace like this?' It is because you have not surrendered yourself to the Divine will but live after your own fashion.

Look at the man who likes to have his own way. His soul is never at peace. He is always discontented – this is not right, that is not as it should be. But the man who is entirely given over to the will of God can pray with a pure mind. His soul loves the Lord, and he finds everything pleasant and agreeable.

Thus did the Most Holy Virgin submit herself to God: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.'ⁱⁱ And were we to say likewise – 'Behold the servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word' – then the Lord's words written in the Gospels by the Holy

ⁱⁱ. Luke i: 38.

Spirit would live in our souls, and the whole world would be filled with the love of God, and how beautiful would life be on earth. And although God's words have been heard the length and breadth of the universe for so many centuries, people do not understand and will not accept them. But the man who lives according to God's will will be glorified in heaven and on earth.

The man who is given over to the will of God is occupied only with God. The grace of God helps him to continue in prayer. He may be working or talking but his soul is absorbed in God, because he has given himself over to God's will, wherefore the Lord has him in His care.

Tradition has it that a robber met the Holy Family on their flight into Egypt, but did them no harm; and when he saw the Child he said that were God to become flesh He would not be more beautiful than this Child; and he left them to go in peace.

What an astonishing thing that a robber, who like a wild beast spares no one, should neither annoy nor hurt the Holy Family! At the sight of the Child and His lowly Mother the robber's heart softened and was touched by the grace of God.

Thus it was, too, with the wild beasts who grew gentle when they saw martyrs and holy men, and did them no harm. And even devils fear the meek and humble soul who vanquishes them through obedience, soberness and prayer.

Another thing to marvel at: the robber had pity on the Infant Lord, but the high-priests and elders delivered Him to Pilate to be crucified. And this was because they did not pray and seek enlightenment of the Lord as to what they should do, and how they should act.

So it often happens that leaders and their people desire good but are ignorant where it is to be found – they do not know that it is in God, and comes from God.

We must always pray to the Lord to tell us what to do, and the Lord will not let us go astray.

Adam was not wise enough to ask the Lord about the fruit which Eve gave him, and so he lost paradise.

David did not ask the Lord whether it would be a good thing if he took Bath-sheba to wife, and so he fell into the sins of murder and adultery.

So with all the saints who sinned: they sinned because they had not called upon God to enlighten and help them. St. Seraphim of Sarov said, 'When I spoke relying on my own mind, I was often in error.'

But there are also sinless mistakes of imperfection – we can note such even in the Mother of God. St. Luke tells us that when she and Joseph were returning from Jerusalem she did not know where her Son was, supposing Him to be among their kinsfolk and acquaintances, and it was only after they had searched three days that they found Him in the temple at Jerusalem, conversing with the elders.ⁱⁱⁱ

Thus the Lord alone is omniscient, and each one of us, *whoever he be*, must pray God for understanding, and consult our spiritual father, that we may avoid making mistakes.

The Holy Spirit sets us all on different paths: one man lives a life of silent solitude in the desert; another prays for mankind; still another is called to minister to Christ's flock, or to preach, or give comfort to the suffering; while yet another serves his neighbour by the fruits of his labour or by his goods – and all these are gifts of the Holy Spirit accorded in varying degrees: to some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.^{iv}

If we loved one another in simplicity of heart, the Lord through the Holy Spirit would show us many miracles, and reveal great mysteries.

God is love insatiable . . .

ⁱⁱⁱ. cf. Luke ii: 44–46.

^{iv}. Mark iv: 20.

My mind is stayed in God, and I leave off writing . . .

How clear it is for me that the Lord guides us! Without Him we cannot even think a good thing. Therefore we must surrender ourselves humbly to the Divine will, that the Lord may direct us.

We all suffer here on earth, and seek freedom, but few there be who know the meaning of freedom, and where it is to be found.

I, too, want freedom, and seek it day and night. I learned that freedom is with God and is given of God to humble hearts who have repented and sacrificed their wills before Him. To those who repent, the Lord gives His peace and the freedom to love Him. And there is nothing better in the world than to love God and one's fellow-man. In this does the soul find rest and joy.

O all ye peoples of the earth, I fall on my knees before you, beseeching you with tears to come to Christ. I know His love for you. I know, and therefore I cry to the whole world. If one does not know a thing how could one speak of it?

'But how can one know God?' you will ask. And I say that we have seen the Lord by the Holy Spirit. And you, if you humble yourself the Holy Spirit will show our Lord to you, too, and you, too, will want to proclaim Him to all the world.

I am an old man awaiting death, and I write the truth out of love for the people over whom my soul grieves. If I should help but a single soul to salvation, I will give thanks to God; but my heart aches for the whole world, and I pray and shed tears for the whole world, that all may repent and know God, and live in love, and delight in freedom in God.

O, all ye peoples of the earth, pray and weep over your sins, that the Lord may forgive them. Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is freedom of conscience and love, be it only in small measure.

The Lord does not desire the death of a sinner, and on him who repents He bestows the grace of the Holy Spirit, which gives peace to the soul and freedom for mind and heart to dwell in God. When the Holy Spirit forgives us our sins we receive freedom to pray to God with an undistracted mind. Then the soul can freely contemplate God and live serene and joyous in Him. And this is true freedom. But without God there can be no freedom, for the enemy agitates the soul with evil thoughts.

I will speak truth before the whole world: I am an abomination in the sight of God, and had not God given me His grace of the Holy Spirit I should despair of my salvation. And the Holy Spirit instructed me, and so I write of God without difficulty, in that He inspires me to write.

I weep and mourn with pity for mankind. Many people think to themselves, 'I have sinned much – plundered and killed, used violence, slandered and led a wanton life; and done many other wrong things.' And shame keeps them from the path of repentance. But they forget that in God's sight all their sins are as drops of water in the sea.

O my brethren the world over, repent while there is still time. God mercifully awaits our repentance. And all heaven and all the Saints look for our repentance. As God is love, so the Holy Spirit in the Saints is love. Ask, and the Lord will forgive. And when you receive forgiveness, there will be joy and gladness in your soul, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will enter your soul, and you will cry: 'This is true freedom. True freedom is in God and of God.'

The grace of God does not take away freedom but only helps man to fulfil God's commandments. Adam knew grace but he could still exercise his will. Thus, too, the angels abide in the Holy Spirit, and yet are not deprived of free-will.

Many people are ignorant of the way of salvation: they walk in darkness and do not see the Light of Truth. But He was,

is and shall be, and in His mercy calls all men to Himself, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden. Know me, and I will give you rest and freedom.'^v

This is true freedom – to be in God. And I did not know this before. Until I was seven and twenty I simply believed that God is, but I did not know Him; but when my soul came to know Him by the Holy Spirit I was consumed with longing for Him, and now day and night I seek Him with burning heart.

The Lord wants us to love one another. In this – in love toward God and our fellow-man – lies freedom. In this lie both freedom and equality. But with society as it is graded on this earth there can be no equality, though that is of no importance to the soul. Not everyone can be an emperor or a prince; not everyone can be a patriarch or an abbot, or a leader; but in every walk of life we can love God and be pleasing to Him, and only this is important. And the man who loves God most in this world will have the most glory in the Kingdom. He who loves most will the most ardently yearn and reach for God, and be closest to Him. Each will be glorified according to the measure of his love. And I have discovered that love varies in strength.

Fearing to grieve God in some fashion – that is the first degree of love. He who keeps his mind pure from intrusive thoughts knows the second degree of love, which is greater than the first. The third and still loftier kind of love is when a man is sensible of grace in his soul.

The fourth and perfect kind of love for God exists when a man possesses the grace of the Holy Spirit in both soul and body. His body is then hallowed, and after death his earthly remains become relics. This is what happens with the holy Martyrs and Prophets and venerable Fathers. The man who loves in this wise is proof against carnal love. He may lie beside a maiden without feeling the smallest desire for her. Love of God is stronger than love for a woman –

^v cf. Matt. xi: 28.

which is attractive to all the world save those who are filled with the grace of God, for the sweetness of the Holy Spirit regenerates the entire man, and teaches him to love God to the utmost. In the fulness of her love for God the soul has no contact with this world; though a man live on earth among other men, in his love for God he is oblivious to everything that is of this world. But our trouble is that because of the pride of our mind we do not continue in this grace, and so grace forsakes us and the soul seeks after it, weeping and groaning and saying:

‘My soul longs for the Lord.’

VII

On Repentance

My soul has known Thee, O Lord, and I write to Thy people of Thy mercy.

Do not murmur, O children of God, because you find life difficult. Only wrestle with sin and entreat help from the Lord, and He will hearken, for He is full of compassion and loves us.

O, all ye peoples, I weep as I pen these lines. My soul's desire is that you should know the Lord and contemplate His mercy and glory. I am an old man of seventy-two years and must shortly die, and I write to you of the Lord's mercy that He gave me to know by the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit taught me to love the people. Would that I could set you on a high mountain, that from the height thereof you might behold the gentle and compassionate countenance of the Lord, that your hearts would rejoice. Verily I tell you: I find no good in me, only many sins, but the grace of the Holy Spirit has effaced the multitude of my sins, and I know that to the man who wrestles against sin the Lord grants, not only forgiveness but likewise the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who brings joy to the soul and a profound, sweet peace.

O Lord, Thou dost love Thy creature;
and who can fathom Thy love, or delight in it,
if he be not taught of Thee Thyself
by Thy Holy Spirit?

I pray Thee, O Lord, send down on Thy peoples

the grace of the Holy Spirit, that they may know Thy love.

Warm their sorrowing hearts, that
forgetful of the afflictions of this earth
they may glorify Thee in joy.

O gracious Comforter, weeping I beseech Thee,
Comfort the afflicted hearts of Thy peoples.

Let the nations hear the sweet sound of Thy voice
saying unto them, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Yea, O Lord, it is in Thy power to perform miracles,
and there is no greater miracle
than to love the sinner in his fall.

A saint is easy to love: he is worthy of love.

Yea, Lord, hearken to our prayer.

All the peoples of the world suffer in distress.

All are cast down by sin.

All are bereft of Thy grace, and live in darkness.

O all ye peoples, let the whole earth cry to God, and our prayer will be heard, for the Lord rejoices in man's repentance; and all the heavenly hosts await us – await the time when we, too, shall delight in the sweetness of the love of God, and behold the beauty of His countenance.

When men continue in fear of God, life on earth is peaceful and sweet. But nowadays people have begun to live according to their own will and understanding, and have forsaken the holy commandments, imagining that they can find joy on earth without the Lord: they do not realise that the Lord alone is our joy. He alone can make glad the soul of man. He warms the soul as the sun warms the flowers of the field, and like the wind which blows down on them He brings life to the soul. The Lord has given us all things that we may glorify Him. But the world does not understand this. And indeed how can a man understand what he has neither beheld nor tasted? I too, when I lived in the world, thought that I knew happiness on this earth because I was strong,

handsome, not poor, and people liked me. And I gloried in this. But when I came to know the Lord by the Holy Spirit, I began to look upon all the delights of this world as so much smoke, which is borne away by the wind. The grace of the Holy Spirit, now, rejoices and gladdens the soul, and in profound peace she contemplates the Lord, unmindful of the earth.

O LORD, turn Thy people to Thee,
that all may come to know Thy love
and in the Holy Spirit behold Thy gentle countenance.
Let contemplation of Thee
gladden the hearts of all men while still here on earth,
that beholding Thee, that which Thou art,
they may become like unto Thee.

Glory be to the Lord that He gave us repentance. Through repentance we shall all, every one of us, be saved. Only those who refuse to repent will not find salvation, and therein I see their despair, and shed abundant tears of pity for them. They have not known through the Holy Spirit how great is God's mercy. But if every soul knew the Lord, knew how deeply He loves us, no one would ever despair, or murmur against his lot.

Every soul that has lost peace should repent and the Lord will forgive her her sins, and there will be joy and peace in the soul. We have no need of other witnesses, for the Spirit Himself testifies that our sins are forgiven. Here is a token of forgiveness: if you now detest sin, it means the Lord has forgiven you your sins.

And what more could we expect? That some voice from heaven sing us a heavenly song? But in heaven everything has life through the Holy Spirit, and the Lord has given us on earth the *same* Holy Spirit. The offices in God's churches are celebrated in the Holy Spirit; in desert, mountain and cave, in every place, Christ's warriors who fight the good fight live by the Holy Spirit. If we preserve the Holy Spirit

we shall be free of all darkness, and life eternal will be in our souls.

If all men would repent and keep God's commandments, there would be paradise on earth, for 'the Kingdom of Heaven is within us.' The Kingdom of Heaven is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the same in heaven and on earth.

To the man who repents, the Lord grants paradise and the Kingdom eternal with Himself. In His great mercy He remembers not our sins, just as He overlooked the sins of the thief on the cross.

Great is Thy mercy, O Lord;
and who is there can render unto Thee worthy thanks
that Thou hast given Thy Holy Spirit on earth?
Great, O Lord, is Thy truth.
Thou didst give Thy promise to Thine Apostles:
'I will not leave you comfortless;ⁱ' and we now experience
this mercy, and know in our souls that Thou lovest us.

Let the man who does not feel this repent and live according to the will of God, and the Lord will then give him His grace to guide his soul. But if you see a man sin and have no pity for him, grace will forsake you.

We are bidden to love, and the love of Christ takes pity on all men, and the Holy Spirit teaches the soul to fulfil God's commandments, and gives us the strength to do good.

O Holy Spirit, forsake us not.
When Thou art with us,
the soul is sensible of Thy presence,
and knows bliss in God,
for Thy gift is an ardent love of God.

ⁱ. John xiv:18.

The Lord so loved His people that He hallowed them by the Holy Spirit and made them like unto Himself. The Lord is merciful, and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to be merciful. Brethren, let us humble ourselves and through repentance acquire compassionate hearts, and then shall we behold the glory of the Lord which is made known to soul and mind through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The truly repentant man readily bears every affliction – hunger and nakedness, cold and heat, sickness and poverty, humiliation and exile, injustice and slander; for his soul is turned with longing towards God, and he has no care for earthly things but prays to God with a pure mind. But the man who is attached to worldly goods and riches can never have a mind pure in God, since in the depths of his soul he is constantly preoccupied with his possessions; and if he does not repent whole-heartedly, and mourn at having grieved God, he will die bearing the burden of his passions, without having come to know the Lord.

If anyone would take away your property, let it go willingly, for love which is of God can refuse no man; but he who does not know love cannot be merciful, for his soul does not possess the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Forasmuch as the merciful Lord by His sufferings gave us on earth the Holy Spirit from the Father, gave us His Body and Blood, it is plain that He will give us all else that is needful. Let us surrender ourselves to the Divine will, and then we shall see God's providence, and the Lord will give us those things we look not for. But the man who is not given over to God's will can never behold God's providence for us.

Let us not be distressed over the loss of worldly goods: such losses are a small matter. My own father taught me this early in life. When some misfortune happened at home, he would remain serene. When our house caught fire and the neighbours said, 'Ivan Petrovich, your house is burnt down!' he replied, 'With God's help I'll build it up again.' Once we were walking along the side of our field, and I

said, 'Look, they're stealing our sheaves!' 'Aye, son,' he answered me, 'the Lord has given us corn and to spare, so if anyone steals it, it means he's in want.' Another day I said to him, 'You give a lot away to charity, while some who are better off than we are give far less.' To which he replied, 'Aye, son, the Lord will provide.' And the Lord did not confound his hope.

The Lord is quick to forgive the sins of the merciful. The merciful man bears no ill-will. He will suffer injury or the loss of his goods with unconcern, for he knows the mercy of God, and *no one can take the Lord's mercy from us*: it comes from on high; it is of God.

All who led pure and sober lives, who were humble and obedient, who repented their sins, have ascended into heaven, and there they behold our Lord Jesus Christ in glory, and hear the songs of the cherubim, and think no more on earthly matters. But we here below are swept about like dust before the wind, while our minds cling to the things of this world.

O, how infirm is my spirit! A little wind can blow it out like a candle; but the spirit of the saints glowed with fire like the burning bush, fearless of the wind. Who will give me such fire that I know rest neither by day nor by night from love of God? The love of God is a consuming fire. For the love of God the saints bore every affliction – it was love of God gave them the power to work miracles. They healed the sick, restored the dead to life. They walked upon the waters, were lifted into the air during prayer, and by their prayers they brought rain down from heaven. But all my desire is to learn humility and the love of Christ, that I may offend no man but pray for all as I *pray for myself*.

Woe is me! I write of the love of God, yet I love God so feebly; wherefore am I exceeding sorrowful, and grieve like Adam when he was driven forth from the garden of Eden,

and I weep and cry aloud, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, have mercy on Thy fallen creature.'

How oft hast Thou given me Thy grace,
and I preserved it not, because my soul was puffed up.
But my soul knows Thee, my Creator and my God,
wherefore I seek Thee weeping,
as Joseph wept on his mother's tomb for Jacob his father,
when he was led into bondage in Egypt.

I have grieved Thee by my sins, and Thou goest from
me,
and my soul yearns after Thee.

Leave me not, O Holy Spirit!
When Thou dost go from me, evil thoughts visit me,
and my soul with much weeping yearns after Thee.

O most holy Mother of God, thou seest my sorrow.
I have grieved the Lord, and He forsaketh me.
But I entreat thee of thy goodness:
Save me, save this fallen creature of God.
Save me, thy servant.

If you think evil of people, it means you have an evil spirit in you whispering evil thoughts about others. And if a man dies without repenting, without having forgiven his brother, his soul will go to the place where lives the evil spirit which possessed his soul.

This is the law we have: if you forgive others, it is a sign that the Lord has forgiven you; but if you refuse to forgive, then your own sin remains with you.

The Lord wants us to love our fellow-man; and if you reflect that the Lord loves him, you have a sign of the Lord's love for you. And if you consider how greatly the Lord loves His creature, and you yourself have compassion on all creation, and love your enemies, counting yourself the vilest

of all, it is a sign of abundant grace of the Holy Spirit in you.

He who has the Holy Spirit in him, to however slight a degree, sorrows day and night for all mankind. His heart is filled with pity for all God's creatures, more especially for those who do not know God, or who resist Him and therefore are bound for the fire of torment. For them, more than for himself, he prays day and night, that all may repent and know the Lord.

Christ prayed for them that were crucifying him: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'ⁱⁱ Stephen the Martyr prayed for those who stoned him, that the Lord 'lay not this sin to their charge.'ⁱⁱⁱ And we, if we wish to preserve grace, must pray for our enemies. If you do not feel pity for the sinner destined to suffer the pains of hell-fire, it means that the grace of the Holy Spirit is not in you, but an evil spirit. While you are still alive, therefore, strive by repentance to free yourself from this spirit.

ⁱⁱ. Luke xxiii:34.

ⁱⁱⁱ. Acts vii:60.

VIII

On the Knowledge of God

The Father so loved us that He gave us His Son: but such was the will of the Son, too, and He became incarnate and lived among us on earth. And the holy Apostles and a multitude of people beheld the Lord in the flesh, but not all knew Him as the Lord; yet it has been given to me, a poor sinner, through the Holy Spirit to know that Jesus Christ is God.

The Lord loves man and reveals Himself to man, as it pleases Him. And when the soul beholds the Lord she humbly rejoices in the Master's compassion, and from that hour her love for her Creator is greater than her any other love – though she may see all things and love all men, yet will she love the Lord above all.

This love the soul knows full well; but it cannot be conveyed in words. Only those on whom the Lord bestows the Holy Spirit can know of it, by the Holy Spirit.

The soul suddenly sees the Lord and knows that it is He. Who shall describe this joy, this gladness?

The Lord is made known in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit pervades *the entire man – soul, mind and body*.

After this wise is God known in heaven and on earth.

The Lord in His boundless mercy accorded this grace to me, a sinner, that others might come to know God and turn to Him.

I write out of the grace of God.

Yea, this is truth.

The Lord Himself is my witness.

The Lord loves us as His own children, and His love is

greater than a mother's love, for even a mother may forget her child, but the Lord is *never* forgetful of us. And had the Lord Himself not given the Holy Spirit to his Orthodox people and to our great shepherds we could not know how truly He loves us.

Glory be to the Lord and His deep compassion in that He endows sinful men with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Rich people and kings may be ignorant of the Lord, yet we poor monks and shepherds know the Lord through the Holy Spirit.

We do not require wealth or learning in order to know the Lord – we must simply be obedient and sober, have a humble spirit and love our fellow-men. The Lord will love such a soul as this, of His own accord make Himself manifest to her and instruct her in love and humility, and give her all things needful for her to find rest in God.

We may study as much as we will but we shall still not come to know the Lord unless we live according to His commandments, for the Lord is not made known through learning but by the Holy Spirit. Many philosophers and scholars have arrived at a belief in the existence of God but they have not come to know God. And we monks apply ourselves day and night to the study of the Lord's command but not all of us by a long way have come to know the Lord, although we believe in Him.

To believe that God exists is one thing, to know God another.

Here is an enigma: there are souls that have come to know the Lord; there are souls that have not come to know Him but believe in Him; and there are others still that not only do not know God but do not believe either, and among their number are to be found learned men.

Pride is at the root of unbelief. The proud man would acquire knowledge of things through his mind and his studying, but it is not given to him to learn to know God, in that

the Lord reveals Himself only to the lowly in heart. To the lowly in heart does the Lord discover His works, which are beyond the understanding of our minds but are unfolded through the Holy Spirit. With the mere mind we can only come to know the things of this earth, and then only in part, while God and all that is of heaven are known through the Holy Spirit.

Some there are who spend their whole lives trying to find out what there is on the sun or the moon, or in seeking like knowledge, yet this is of no profit to the soul. But if we take pains to explore the human heart, this is what we shall see: the Kingdom of Heaven in the soul of the saint but in the soul of the sinner – darkness and torment. And it is good to know this because we shall dwell eternally either in the Kingdom or in torment.

Though a man be eager to investigate everything he sees on earth and in heaven, if he is not given to prayer and does not know the Lord, or seek to know Him, then when he hears other men teaching of God he says:

‘Now, how is it possible to know God? And how is it that you know Him?’

I would reply, ‘The Holy Spirit is witness. The Holy Spirit knows, and He instructs us.’

‘But can anyone see the Spirit?’

The Apostles saw the Spirit descending in tongues of fire, and we feel His presence within us, sweeter far than all earthly things. The Prophets tasted Him, and spoke to the people, and the people hearkened unto them. The holy Apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost, and preached salvation to mankind, fearing naught, for the Spirit of God was their strength. When St. Andrew was threatened with death upon the cross if he did not cease preaching, he replied:

‘If I feared the cross, I should not be preaching the cross.’

In this manner all the other Apostles, and after them the martyrs and holy men who wrestled against evil, went forward with joy to meet pain and suffering. And all because the Holy Spirit, sweet and gracious, draws the soul to love

the Lord, and in the sweetness of the Holy Spirit the soul loses her fear of suffering.

Many holy martyrs came to know the Lord and His help in the time of their sufferings. Many monks strive much and endure valiantly for the Lord's sake; they, too, have come to know the Lord, and contend against their passions, and pray for the whole universe. The grace of God teaches them to love their enemies, since the man who has no love for his enemies cannot come to know the Lord, Who died on the cross for His enemies, and gave us an example in Himselfⁱ with the commandment to love our enemies.

The Lord is love; and He commanded us to love one another, and to love our enemies; and the Holy Spirit instructs us in this love.

The soul that has not come to know the Holy Spirit does not understand how it is possible to love one's enemies, and will not accept this commandment; but the Lord has pity on all, and he who would be with the Lord must love his enemies.

The man to whom the Lord is known through the Holy Spirit becomes like unto the Lord, as St. John the Divine said, 'We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is,'ⁱⁱ and we shall behold His glory.

You will say that a great many people are suffering every kind of adversity, and from evil men; but I entreat you, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God,ⁱⁱⁱ and grace will be your teacher and you yourself will long to suffer for the sake of the love of the Lord. That is what the Holy Spirit, Whom we have come to know in the Church, will teach you.

ⁱ. cf. John xiii:15.

ⁱⁱ. 1 John iii:2.

ⁱⁱⁱ. 1 Pet. v:6.

But the man who cries out against evil men but does not pray for them will never know the grace of God.

If you would know of the Lord's love for us, hate sin and evil thoughts, and day and night pray fervently. The Lord will then give you His grace, and you will know Him through the Holy Spirit, and after death, when you enter into paradise, there, too, you will know the Lord through the Holy Spirit, as you knew Him on earth.

Both in heaven and on earth the Lord is made known only by the Holy Spirit, and not through ordinary learning. Even children, who have no learning at all, come to know the Lord by the Holy Spirit. St. John the Baptist felt the presence of the Lord while still in his mother's womb. St. Simeon Stylites of the Wonderful Mountain was a seven-year-old boy when the Lord appeared to him and he knew Him. St. Seraphim was a grown man of twenty-seven when the Lord appeared to him during the Liturgy; whereas Simeon was stricken with years when he received the Lord into his arms in the temple, and knew Him.

Thus does the Lord bend His ways to us, to bring the more comfort to every soul.

The Lord's love is made known in no other wise than through the Holy Spirit; but the peaceable soul that preserves a pure conscience comes to know God from His works, that He created heaven and earth. And this, too, is the working of grace, though as yet in small measure; whereas without grace we cannot come to know God with our minds but are continually drawn to the things of this earth – to riches, honour and glory and other satisfactions.

Just as the love of Jesus Christ is beyond our understanding, so we cannot conceive of the depth of His suffering, because our own love for the Lord is so infinitesimal. But with greater love comes more understanding even of the Lord's sufferings. There is love in small degree, modest love and

perfect love; and the more perfect our love, the more perfect our knowledge.

We may say that we are able to treat of God only in so far as we have known the grace of the Holy Spirit; for how can a man think on and consider a thing that he has not seen or heard tell of, and does not know? Now the Saints declare that they have seen God; yet people say that God is not. No doubt they say this inasmuch as they have not known God, but that does not at all mean that He does not exist.

The Saints speak of that which they have actually seen, of that which they know. They do not speak of something they have not seen. They do not tell us, for instance, that they have seen a horse a mile long, or a steamer ten miles long, which do not exist. And I think that if God were not, then there would be no intimation of Him on earth. But people want to live after their own fashion and consequently they declare that God is not, and in so doing they establish that He is.

Even the souls of the heathen sensed that God is, though they were ignorant how to worship the true God. But the Holy Spirit instructed the prophets of old, and after them the Apostles and then our holy Fathers and Bishops, and in this wise the true faith came down to us. And we knew the Lord by the Holy Spirit, and when we knew Him our souls were confirmed in Him.

The soul that has come to know the Lord is instinctively sensible of the presence of her Creator, and dwells in Him in great peace and joy. To what can I liken this joy? It is like the joy that abounds when a beloved son returns to his father's house after long years in a far country, and can talk to his dear ones – his father and mother, brothers and sisters – to his heart's content.

O ye peoples of the earth, fashioned by God, know your Creator and His love for us! Know the love of Christ, and

live in peace and thereby rejoice the Lord, Who in His mercy waits for all men to come to Him.

Turn to Him, all ye peoples of the earth, and lift up your prayers to God; and the prayers of the whole earth shall rise to heaven like a soft and lovely cloud lit by the sun, and all the heavens will rejoice, and sing praises to the Lord for His sufferings whereby He saved us.

Know, all ye peoples, that we are created for the glory of God in the heavens. Cleave not to the earth, for God is our Father and He loves us like dear children.

The Merciful Lord gave the Holy Spirit on earth, and by the Holy Spirit was the Holy Church established.

The Holy Spirit unfolded to us, not only the things of the earth but those, too, which are of heaven.

By the Holy Spirit we came to know the love of the Lord, which is a consuming love. Filled with love, the holy Apostles went into all the world, and their spirit thirsted that all men might know the Lord.

The Prophets, beloved of the Lord, rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, wherefore the words they spoke were mighty and pleasant, for every soul would hear the word of the Lord.

O wonder of wonders! The Lord did not despise me, wretched sinner that I am, but by His Holy Spirit gave me to know Him.

Grant me, O Lord, a lowly spirit,
that I may at all times thank Thee
that Thou didst give Thy Holy Spirit on earth.
And I have Him in remembrance.
He Himself helpeth me to keep Him in my thoughts.

O Holy Spirit, Sovereign King,
what shall I, steeped in iniquity, render unto Thee?
Thou didst reveal to me mystery incomprehensible.
Thou didst give me to know the Lord, my Creator.
Thou didst give me to know His measureless love for us.

The Lord loves us so dearly that it passes description. Through the Holy Spirit alone can the soul know His love, of which she is inexpressibly aware. The Lord is all goodness and mercy. He is meek and gentle, and we have no words to tell of His goodness; but the soul without words senses this love, and would remain wrapped in its soft tranquillity for ever.

He said, 'I will not leave you comfortless;^{iv} and we see in truth that He did not forsake us but gave us the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit invisibly instructs the soul. In the Holy Spirit the soul acquires peace. The Holy Spirit gladdens the soul and brings her joy on earth. How much greater joy and gladness shall we know in heaven? We are taught of the Holy Spirit to know the love of God, but there it will be complete. O, how infirm am I – I once knew God's love in its perfection, yet I cannot possess myself of it, and my soul weeps day after day, and the thought is ever in my mind: 'Still have I not received that which my soul seeks.'

When the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire on the Apostles, experience gave them to know the meaning of love of God and love for man.

'My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,'^v wrote the Apostle.

O, how happy should I be were all nations to come to know the Lord!

O Lord, do Thou grant them to know Thee by Thy Holy Spirit.

As Thou didst give the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and they knew Thee, so grant all peoples to know Thee, by the Holy Spirit.

^{iv}. John xiv:18.

^v. Gal. iv:19.

IX

On Love

My soul thirsts for the living God. Time and again my soul seeks fulness of delight in the Lord. O mercy of God that passeth all understanding! The Lord formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the soul of man was made kin to God.

The Lord so loved His creature that He gave man the Holy Spirit, and man knew his Creator and loves his Lord.

The Holy Spirit is love and sweetness to the soul, the mind and the body; but when the soul loses grace, or grace is diminished, once again the soul will seek the Holy Spirit in tears, and yearn for God, and cry:

‘My soul yearns for the Lord, and I seek Him in tears.

‘How could I not seek Thee, O Lord? For Thou Thyself didst seek me out aforehand, and gavest me to delight in Thy Holy Spirit; and now my soul yearns for Thee. My heart fell to loving Thee, and I pray Thee: Give me to the end to abide in Thy love. Empower me for the sake of Thy love to endure all sickness and affliction.’

Fear and trembling seize my soul when I would write of the love of God.

My soul is poor and without strength to describe the Lord’s love.

And the soul is afraid and yet is drawn to set down, be it but a word or two of the love of Christ.

My spirit fails but love constrains me to write of these things.

O man – what a feeble creature thou art!

When grace dwells within us, the spirit glows and reaches day and night towards the Lord, for grace impels the soul to love God; and now that she has come to love Him she cannot tear herself from Him – never can she have enough of the tenderness of the Holy Spirit.

And there is no end to God's love.

I know a man whom the Lord in His mercy visited with His grace. And had the Lord asked him, 'Wouldst thou have Me give thee more?', from weakness of the flesh his soul would have made answer:

'Thou seest, Lord, that I cannot bear more and would die,' for man is compassed about and cannot carry the fulness of grace.

Thus on Mount Tabor the disciples fell on their face before the glory of the Lord. And no man can conceive how the Lord gives grace to the soul.

Good and gracious art Thou, O Lord. I give thanks for Thy mercy: Thou hast poured down Thy Holy Spirit on me and given me to taste of Thy love for me, grievous sinner that I am, and my soul is drawn to Thee, O Light unapproachable.

What man could have knowledge of Thee, didst Thou not graciously deign to reveal Thyself to the soul? And the soul beheld Thee, and knew her Creator and her God, and ever longs insatiable for Thee, for Thou, O gracious Lord, didst draw the soul to Thee with love, and the soul knew Thy love.

Thou seest, O Lord, how infirm and sinful is the soul of man, but in Thy mercy Thou givest the soul strength to love Thee, and the soul goes in fear lest she lose her humility that the enemy would wrest from her, for then Thy grace will forsake the soul.

What shall I render unto the Lord?

I am a sorry wretch, as the Lord knows, but my pleasure is to humble my soul and love my neighbour, though he may have given me offence. At all times I beseech the Lord

Who is merciful to grant that I may love my enemies; and by the grace of God I have experienced what the love of God is, and what it is to love my neighbour; and day and night I pray the Lord for love, and the Lord gives me tears to weep for the whole world. But if I find fault with any man, or look on him with an unkind eye, my tears will dry up, and my soul sink into despondency. Yet do I begin again to entreat forgiveness of the Lord, and the Lord in His mercy forgives me, a sinner.

Brethren, before the face of my God I write: Humble your hearts, and while yet on this earth you will see the mercy of the Lord, and know your Heavenly Creator, and your souls will never have their fill of love.

No man of himself can know what God's love is unless he be taught of the Holy Spirit; but God's love is known in our Church through the Holy Spirit, and so we speak of this love.

The sinful soul which does not know the Lord fears death, thinking that the Lord will not forgive her her sins. But this is because the soul does not know the Lord and how greatly He loves us. But if people knew this, then no man would despair, for the Lord not only forgives but rejoices exceedingly at the return of a sinner. Though you be at death's door, believe firmly that the moment you ask, you will receive forgiveness.

The Lord is not like us. He is passing meek, and merciful, and good; and when the soul knows Him she marvels greatly, and exclaims: 'O what a Lord is ours!'

The Holy Spirit gave our Church to know how great is God's mercy.

The Lord loves us, and gently, without reproach, receives us, just as the father in the Gospel story did not reproach his prodigal son but called his servants to bring a new robe, and put a precious ring on his finger and shoes on his feet,

and told them to kill the fatted calf, and be merry; and in nothing did he condemn his son.

O, how gently and patiently in our turn must we set our brother right, that there may be rejoicing in the soul over his return!

The Holy Spirit teaches the soul ineffable lovingkindness.

O brethren, let us forget the earth and all that therein is! The earth entices us from contemplation of the Holy Trinity, Which our minds cannot apprehend but Which the saints in heaven behold in the Holy Spirit.

We, for our part, should continue in prayer without imaginings, and ask of the Lord a humble spirit, and the Lord will love us and give us here on earth all things wholesome for soul and body.

O Merciful Lord, give Thy grace
to all the peoples of the earth,
that they may come to know Thee,
for without Thy Holy Spirit
man cannot know Thee, and conceive of Thy love.

Little children, know the Creator of heaven and earth!

O Lord, send Thy mercy on the children of the earth,
whom Thou dost love,
and give them to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.
With tears I implore Thee, hear my prayer for Thy
children,
and grant that all may know Thy glory
through the Holy Spirit.

Since the days of my youth I have loved to reflect: The Lord ascended into heaven and awaits our coming; but to be with the Lord we must be like Him, or like little children – lowly and meek – and we must serve Him. Then, according to the words of the Lord, ‘Where I am, there shall also my servant

beⁱ – we, too, shall be with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. But now this day my soul is very downcast and dejected, and I am unable to lift an undistracted mind to God, and I have no tears wherewith to bewail my evil deeds: my soul is withered away and spent with the night of this life.

O, who shall sing me the song that I have loved since the days of my youth – the song of the Lord's ascension into heaven, of His love for us, of the vigil He keeps for our coming? To this song would I hearken with tears, for my soul wearies on earth.

What has befallen me? How came I to lose joy, and shall I attain to that joy again?

Weep with me, all ye wild beasts and birds. Weep with me, forest and desert. Weep with me, every creature created of God, and comfort me in my grief and sorrow.

In this wise I reflect in my soul: if I who love God so *little* am so violently heartsick for the Lord, how *exceeding great* must have been the grief of the Mother of God when she was left on earth after the Ascension of her Lord.

She put not in writing the tale of her soul's affliction, and we know little of her life on earth, but this much we must suppose – the abundance of her love for her Son and her God reaches beyond our understanding.

Her heart, her every thought, her entire soul were wrapped up in the Lord; but to her was given something further – she loved mankind and prayed ardently for people, for newly-converted Christians, that the Lord might sustain them, and for the whole world that all might be saved. This prayer was her joy and comfort on earth.

We cannot fathom the depth of the love of the Mother of God, but this we know:

The greater the love, the greater the sufferings of the soul.
The fuller the love, the fuller the knowledge of God.
The more ardent the love, the more fervent the prayer.

ⁱ John xii.26.

The more perfect the love, the holier the life.

Not one of us is able to attain to the fulness of the Mother of God's love, and we have need of repentance like Adam. Yet in part, as we are taught of the Holy Spirit in the Church, we may comprehend that love of hers.

'Did not our heart burn within us?'ⁱⁱⁱ said the Apostles after Christ drew near them. So does the soul recognise and love her Lord, and the delight of His love is a burning delight.

In heaven there is one and the same love in the hearts of all, but on earth some there are that greatly love the Lord, others who love Him in small degree, while still others love Him not at all.

The soul that is filled with love of God is oblivious both of heaven and of earth. The spirit burns, and invisibly beholds the Desired One, and the soul sheds many sweet tears and is unable to forget the Lord for a single second, for the grace of God gives strength to love the Beloved.

O in what glory dwells the Lord! What songs exalt Him in the heavens, and how sweet are those songs that pour forth for love of God!

Who is worthy to hear these songs that are sung through the Holy Spirit, and which magnify the Lord for His sufferings, and what joy will there be at the sound of them?

On earth the soul has only to touch upon the love of God for the sweetness of the Holy Spirit to transport her in wonder at her beloved God and Heavenly Father.

Beloved Brethren, let us humble ourselves that we may be worthy of the love of God; that the Lord may adorn us with His lowliness of spirit, with His humility; that we may become worthy of the heavenly mansions which the Lord has made ready for us.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke xxiv:32.

The Lord has love for all men but His love is greater for the one who seeks Him.

‘I love them that love me,’ saith the Lord, ‘and those that seek me shall find grace.’ⁱⁱⁱ And with grace life is good, and the soul rejoices and says, ‘MY Lord, I am THY servant.’

In these words there is great joy: if the Lord is *ours*, then *all things are ours*. That is how rich we are!

Great and inapprehensible is our Lord, but for our sakes He belittled Himself that we might know Him and love Him; that for love of Him we should forget the earth, and live in heaven and behold the glory of the Lord.

The Lord bestows such rich grace on His chosen that they embrace the whole earth, the whole world with their love, and their souls burn with longing that all men should be saved and behold the glory of the Lord.

The Lord said to His holy disciples, ‘Children, have ye any meat?’^{iv} What great love those tender words express! The Lord calls us ‘children’! What could rejoice us more? We should ponder these words, and think on the Lord’s sufferings for us on the Cross.

O how the Lord loves His creation!

And behold the Lord has vouchsafed us to speak together of these things, and our spirit rejoices that the Lord is with us.

Humbly I entreat you – pray for me, and the Lord will reward you.

Brother R. told me how once when he lay seriously ill his mother said to his father, ‘How poorly our little lad is! I would gladly let myself be cut in pieces if that would help him and ease his sufferings.’

The Lord’s love for mankind is like that. He said, ‘Greater

ⁱⁱⁱ. cf. Proverbs viii:17

^{iv}. John xxi:5.

love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.^v The Lord's compassion for men was so strong that He wanted to suffer for them, as a mother suffers, and even more. But no man can conceive of this great love without the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures tell of this love but neither are they to be understood by the mind, for in the Scriptures, too, speaks the same Holy Spirit.

The Lord's love is such that He would have all men to be saved, and abide eternally with Him in heaven, and behold His glory. We do not know the fulness of this glory but through the Holy Spirit we may conceive of it in part. But the man who has not come to know the Holy Spirit can have no conception of this glory: he can only believe in the promise of the Lord, and keep His commandments. However, he, too, is blessed, as the Lord explained to St. Thomas,^{vi} and will have equal place with those who beheld the glory of God while still here below.

If you would know the Lord, humble yourself to the utmost, be obedient and sober in all things, love truth, and the Lord *of a surety* will give you to know Him through the Holy Spirit; and then you will know by experience just what love towards God is, and what is love towards man. And the more perfect the love, the more perfect your knowledge. There is love in small measure; there is a mean of love; and there is great love.

The man who fears sin loves God; the man with a gentle heart loves Him more; still greater is the love of the man in whose soul dwell light and joy; but the man with grace in soul and body knows perfect love. This is the grace that the Holy Spirit gave to the martyrs, the grace that helped them to bear every suffering with fortitude.

Is it possible to tell of paradise and what it will be like there?

^v. John xv:13.

^{vi}. cf. John xx:29.

Only the man who in the Holy Spirit has come to know the Lord and His love for us can speak of paradise.

The Lord is so dear and so kind that from love of Him the soul can think of naught else. The grace of the Holy Spirit is so wondrous sweet, and so transforms a man that he will even forget father and mother.

The soul that has come to know the Lord in His fulness, and delighted in Him, desires naught else, and clings to naught on earth, and were she offered a kingdom she would have no desire for it, for the love of Christ is so sweet, and so rejoices and gladdens the soul, that even to live like a king would hold no attraction.

I would speak for a moment – in so far as the grace of God will enlighten me – of the various degrees of love for God.

Where a man fears to distress God by sinning in any way – that is the first degree of love. The man whose mind is undistracted has love in the second degree, which is greater than the first. A third and still higher degree of love is when a man is aware of grace in his soul. And, finally, the man who has the grace of the Holy Spirit both in soul and body is in a state of perfect love; and if he preserves this grace, the bones of his body will become sacred relics, as did the bones of the holy martyrs, the prophets, the blessed fathers and other great saints.

The man who continues in love such as this will not be tempted by the love of a maiden like other men, for from sweetness of the love of God the soul is oblivious of all earthly things. The grace of the Holy Spirit draws the soul to love the Lord with all her being, and in fulness of love for the Lord the soul preserves no contact with this world, even though she dwells on earth.

We are proud-minded, and therefore unable to continue in this grace, which withdraws from the soul. Then the soul yearns after the grace she has lost, and seeks it anew with tears, and weeps bitterly and calls upon the Lord, saying:

‘O merciful Lord, Thou seest my soul’s lamenting, my yearning after Thee.’

There is no man on earth so gentle and lowly in spirit as our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him is our joy, in Him our gladness. Let us give Him our love, and He will lead us into His Kingdom, where we shall behold His glory.

These forty years – ever since the Lord through the Holy Spirit gave me to know the love of God – have I grieved over God’s people.

O brethren, there is naught better than the love of God, when the Lord fires the soul with love for God and our fellow-man.

Great is the Lord’s mercy! My soul came to know God, her Heavenly Father, and she weeps and mourns for having grieved Him so often, and the Lord accords her forgiveness of sins, and the joy and gladness of loving her Creator, and of loving and weeping for her fellows, that the Lord in His mercy may take every soul to Himself, to the place He prepared for us by His sufferings on the cross.

The man who knows the delight of the love of God – when the soul warmed by grace knows love for God and her brother – knows in part that ‘the kingdom of God is within us.’^{vii.}

O gracious Lord, how great is Thy love for me, a sinner!

Thou didst give me to know Thee.

Thou didst give me to taste of Thy grace.

‘O taste and see that the Lord is good,’^{viii.}

Thou hast let me to taste of Thy goodness and mercy, and, insatiable, my soul reaches toward Thee day and night,

and cannot forget her beloved Creator,

^{vii.} Luke xvii:21.

^{viii.} Ps. xxxiv:8.

for the Spirit of God gives her strength
to love the Beloved.

My soul's longing knows no appeasement
but strains to her heavenly Father.

Blessed is the soul that loves humility and tears, and
abhors all evil thoughts.

Blessed is the soul that loves her brother, for *our brother is
our life*.

Blessed is the soul that loves her brother: the Spirit of the
Lord lives manifest within her, affording peace and gladness,
and she weeps for the whole world.

My soul remembered the Lord's love, and my heart grew
warm. My soul was given over to bitter lamentation that I
had so deeply grieved the Lord, my beloved Creator; but
He remembered not my sins; and then my soul surrendered
to profound and sorrowful weeping that the Lord might have
mercy on every soul and take each one into His Heavenly
Kingdom.

And my soul weeps for the whole world.

I cannot remain silent concerning the people, whom I love
to the point of tears. I cannot remain silent because my soul
ever grieves for the people of God, and weeping I pray for
them. I cannot refrain from making known to you, brethren,
the mercy of God and the wiles of the enemy.

Forty years have gone by since the grace of the Holy Spirit
taught me to love mankind and every living thing, and
revealed to me the wiles of the enemy, who works his evil
in the world by means of deceit.

Believe me, brethren. I write before the face of God,
Whom my soul by His mercy knew through the Holy Spirit.
But had my soul not tasted of the Holy Spirit, she could not
know the Lord, nor His love.

The Lord is gracious and good but we could tell naught
of His love beyond what is in the Scriptures, were we not

taught by the Holy Spirit. But you, brother, be not troubled if you do not sense the love of God within yourself: think on the Lord, how He is gracious, and keep yourself from sin, and the grace of God will instruct you.

Love does not depend on time, and the power of love continues always. There are some who believe that the Lord suffered death for love of man but because they do not attain to this love in their own souls, it seems to them that it is all an old story of bygone days. But when the soul knows the love of God through the Holy Spirit, she feels without a shadow of doubt that the Lord is our Father, the closest and dearest of fathers, and there is no greater happiness than to love God with all our mind, with all our heart and with all our soul, according to the Lord's commandment, and our neighbour as ourself. And when this love is in the soul, everything rejoices her, but when it is lost sight of, man cannot find peace, and is troubled, and blames others as if they had done him an injury, and does not realise that he himself is at fault: he has lost his love for God and has accused, or conceived a hatred for, his brother.

Grace proceeds from brotherly love, and by brotherly love is grace preserved; but if we do not love our brother, then the grace of God will not come into our souls.

If people kept Christ's commandments, there would be paradise on earth, and with little labour man would suffice his needs, and the Divine Spirit would live in the souls of man, for He Himself seeks us and would dwell in us, and if He does not take up His abode in us, it is all because of the arrogance of our minds.

Nowadays men's hearts have grown proud, and only through affliction and repentance can we arrive at salvation, while as for love – it is rarely attained.

The great St. Antony said, 'I no longer fear God but love Him.' He said this because his soul was flooded with the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who testifies to this love, and then

it is impossible for the soul to speak otherwise. But to those who have not this immense grace, the holy Fathers teach repentance; and repentance is not far removed from love, whose coming depends on simplicity of heart and humility.

If a man thinks kindly of his brother, deeming that the Lord loves him – and especially if he believes that the Holy Spirit dwells in his soul – that man is close to the love of God.

One of you may protest: he does nothing but discourse on the love of God. But what else should we deliberate on but God? Did He not create us that we might live eternally with Him and behold His glory? When a man loves, his desire is to talk of the object of his love; and then habit enters in – if you make a habit of thinking of God, you will always carry God with you in your soul. If you are for ever thinking of earthly matters, they will absorb your mind. Make a habit of meditating on the Lord's sufferings, or on eternal fire, and they will become engrained in your soul.

God helps us in what is good, while the enemy incites us to evil, but this depends also on our own wills; we must constrain ourselves to do good, but with moderation and knowing the measure of our strength. We must study our souls to know what is salutary for us: it may be more profitable for one man to pray, for another to read or write. It is a good thing to read but it is better to pray without distraction, and better still to weep: to each as it is given to him by the Lord. To be sure, when we rise from sleep we must render thanks to God, then repent and pray our fill. Next, we should read to rest the mind, and after that pray again, and then work. Grace proceeds from everything that is good. But above all from brotherly love.

One Easter-time after Vespers I was on my way back from the Monastery to where I lived at the mill, and by the roadside stood a labourer. When I drew level with him he asked me to give him an egg. Not having any, I returned to the Monastery, got a couple from my spiritual father and gave one to the labourer. He said, 'There are two of us at

home.' I gave him the other egg also, and afterwards I wept with pity for the poverty-stricken people, and felt compassion for the whole universe and every living creature.

Another time, also at Easter, I was walking along from the main gates of the Monastery to the new Transfiguration block when I saw a little four-year-old boy running towards me with a happy face – the grace of God gladdens the hearts of children. I had an egg on me, which I gave to the child. He was delighted, and ran off to show his present to his father. And for a little thing like that I received great joy from God, and took a love for every one of God's creatures, and my soul sensed the Divine Spirit. Reaching home, seized with pity for the world, I prayed long to God, weeping many tears.

O Holy Spirit, dwell in us always!
It is good to be with Thee.

But it is not always this well with my soul: grace is lost through pride and then I fall to lamenting, as Adam lamented his lost paradise, and I cry,

Where art Thou, O my Light? Where art Thou, my joy?
Why hast Thou forsaken me? My heart is heavy.
Why hast Thou hidden Thyself from me?
And my soul is sorrowful.

When Thou camest into my soul, Thou didst consume
my sins with fire.
Come now again into my soul,
and again consume my sins with fire,
for they conceal Thee from me as clouds conceal the sun.

Do Thou come and rejoice me with Thy coming.

Why tarryest Thou, O Lord?
Thou seest how my soul languishes,

and I seek Thee in tears.

Where hidest Thou Thyself?

Indeed, Thou art in every place,
but my soul sees Thee not, and aching and in sorrow seeks
Thee.

In like manner the Most Holy Virgin, and Joseph,
sought Thee, sick at heart, when Thou wast a young lad.
What thoughts passed through her sorrowing mind
when she found not her beloved Son?^{ix.}

Likewise did the hearts of the Holy Apostles grow heavy
at the death of their Lord, mourning that their hope was
lost. But the Lord appeared to them after His Resurrection,
and they knew Him, and rejoiced.

So now does the Lord manifest Himself to our souls, and
the soul knows Him by the Holy Spirit. Simeon of the
Wonderful Mountain was a child when the Lord appeared
to him, and he had not known Him before, but when the
Lord appeared to him, he knew Him by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord gave the Holy Spirit on earth, and by the Holy
Spirit the Lord and all things heavenly are made known;
whereas without the Holy Spirit man is but sinful clay.

The soul is filled with such insatiable love for God that the
mind in all its strength dwells continually in God, captive
only to Him.

God has shown me much mercy, though by my deeds I
merit punishment both here on earth and after death. But the
Lord so loves mankind that we are unable even to conceive of
such love.

Happy is the sinner who has turned to God and loves
Him.

The man who has come to loathe sin has mounted the

^{ix.} cf. Luke ii:48.

first rung of the heavenly ladder. When he is not tempted in his heart to sin, he is already on the second rung; while the man who through the Holy Spirit has come to know perfect love of God has reached the third step of the ladder. But this rarely happens with anyone.

If we wish to love God, we must observe all that the Lord commanded of us in the Gospels. Our hearts must brim with compassion, and not only feel love for our fellow-men but sympathy for every thing created of God. That green leaf on the tree which you needlessly plucked – it was not wrong, only rather a pity for the little leaf. The heart that has learned to love feels sorry for every created thing. But man is a supreme creation, and therefore if you see that he has gone astray, and is bringing destruction on himself, pray for him, and weep for him if you are able, or at least sigh for him in the sight of God. And the soul that acts after this fashion is beloved of the Lord, for she is like unto Him.

In this wise Paissius the Great prayed for his disciple who had denied Christ and taken a Hebrew woman to wife, entreating the Lord to forgive him. And his prayer so rejoiced the Lord that He Himself was minded to comfort His servant, and He appeared to him and said, 'Paissius, why prayest thou for him who hath denied Me?' But Paissius answered, 'O Lord, Thou art merciful, do Thou forgive him.' Then said the Lord, 'O Paissius, thou art like unto Me with thy love.' So pleasing to the Lord is prayer for our enemies.

Though I am a great sinner, I write of the mercy of God, which my soul came to know on earth through the Holy Spirit.

The soul cannot know peace unless she prays for her enemies. The soul that has learned of God's grace to pray, feels love and compassion for every created thing, and in particular for mankind, for whom the Lord suffered on the Cross, and His soul was heavy for every one of us.

The Lord taught me to love my enemies. Without the

grace of God we cannot love our enemies. Only the Holy Spirit teaches love, and then even devils arouse our pity because they have fallen from good, and lost humility in God.

I beseech you, put this to the test. When a man affronts you or brings dishonour on your head, or takes what is yours, or persecutes the Church, pray to the Lord, saying: 'O Lord, we are all Thy creatures. Have pity on Thy servants, and turn their hearts to repentance,' and you will be aware of grace in your soul. To begin with, constrain your heart to love enemies, and the Lord, seeing your good will, will help you in all things, and experience itself will show you the way. But the man who thinks with malice of his enemies has not God's love within him, and does not know God.

If you will pray for your enemies, peace will come to you; but when you can love your enemies – know that a great measure of the grace of God dwells in you, though I do not say perfect grace as yet, but sufficient for salvation. Whereas if you revile your enemies, it means there is an evil spirit living in you and bringing evil thoughts into your heart, for, in the words of the Lord, 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts'^x. or good thoughts.

The good man thinks to himself in this wise: every one who has strayed from the truth brings destruction on himself and is therefore to be pitied. But of course the man who has not learned love of the Holy Spirit will not pray for his enemies. The man who has learned love from the Holy Spirit sorrows all his life over those who are not saved, and sheds abundant tears for the people, and the grace of God gives him strength to love his enemies.

If you cannot love, then at least do not revile or curse your enemies, and things will already be better; but if a man curse and abuse his enemies, it is plain that an evil spirit lives in him, and if he does not repent, when he dies he will go

^x. Matt. xv:19; Mark vii:21.

to the place where evil spirits dwell. May the Lord preserve every soul from such adversity!

Understand me. It is so simple. People who do not know God, or who go against Him, are to be pitied; the heart sorrows for them and the eye weeps. Both paradise and torment are clearly visible to us: we know this through the Holy Spirit. And did not the Lord Himself say, 'The kingdom of God is within you'?^{xi} Thus eternal life has its beginnings here in this life; and here it is that we sow the seeds of eternal torment.

Where there is pride there cannot be grace, and if we lose grace we also lose both love of God and assurance in prayer. The soul is then tormented by evil thoughts and does not understand that she must humble herself and love her enemies, for there is no other way to please God.

'The enemy persecutes the Holy Church,' you say. 'Am I then to love him?' My answer is this: 'Your poor soul has not come to know God, how greatly He loves us, and how longingly He looks for all men to repent and be saved. The Lord is love, and He gave the Holy Spirit on earth, Who teaches the soul to love her enemies and pray for them, that they, too, may find salvation. That is true love. But if they are to be judged according to their deeds, then they merit punishment.'

Glory be to the Lord for His great love toward us, that He forgives us our sins, and reveals His mysteries to us by the Holy Spirit!

The Lord gave us the commandment, 'Love your enemies.'^{xii} But how are we to love them that do us evil? Or how can we love those who persecute the Holy Church?

When the Lord was on His way to Jerusalem and the Samaritans did not receive Him, His disciples John and James

^{xi}. Luke xvii:21

^{xii}. Matt. v:44.

were ready to call down fire from heaven to consume them; but the Lord in His mercy said, 'I am not come to destroy but to save.'^{xiii} Thus our one thought must be that all should be saved. The soul sorrows for her enemies and prays for them because they have strayed from the truth and their faces are set towards hell. That is love for our enemies. When Judas bethought him to betray the Lord, the Lord was stirred to pity and shewed him what he was doing. Thus must we, too, be gentle with those who err and stray, and we shall be saved by God's mercy.

Love is made known by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit the soul knows through peace and loveliness. O, how we should render thanks to God for His great love towards us! Consider, my beloved brethren: the Lord bestows His Holy Spirit on the sinful soul and gives her to know His mercy. And to know God we have no need of riches: we need only love our neighbour and be lowly in spirit, sober and obedient, and for these virtues the Lord allows us to know Him. Could any thing on earth be more precious than this knowledge? To know God, know how He loves us and enlightens our spirits in the way they should go?

Where would you find a father prepared to die on the cross for the transgressions of his children? The ordinary father grieves and is sorry for his son who must be punished for his wrong-doing; but for all his pity he tells him that he has done wrong and that it is right that he should be punished for his crimes.

But the Lord will never say this to us. He will ask us, also, as He asked the Apostle Peter, 'Lovest thou me?'^{xiv} So in paradise, too, He will say to all people, 'And you, do you love me?' And all will answer Him, 'Yea, Lord, we love Thee. Thou didst save us by Thy sufferings on the cross,

^{xiii}. cf. Luke ix:54-56.

^{xiv}. John xxi:15.

and now Thou hast given us the gift of the Kingdom of Heaven.'

And no man shall be ashamed in heaven, as Adam and Eve were ashamed after the Fall, but meekness, love and humility will reign – not the humility we know now when we humble ourselves and bear with obloquy, or reckon ourselves the worst of men; but all will have Christ-like humility which is beyond the comprehension of every one, save of those who have been taught of the Holy Spirit.

I cannot understand why it is people do not ask the Lord for peace. For the Lord loves us so dearly that He would refuse us nothing. I used not to know this, and thought in my ignorance: Is the Lord going to be solicitous for me, since I have so often grieved Him? But then my soul was filled with the love of God and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit – and to such an extent that had the Lord asked me, 'Wilt thou that I give thee My love and the grace of the Holy Spirit in greater measure?' my soul would have said, 'Thou seest, O Lord, that I cannot bear more, I would die.' And if the measure of the Lord's wondrous mercy to a sinner is beyond comprehension, what are we to say about the Saints? What grace is theirs?

It may be one of you will ask, 'Why does the Lord not love me like that, and give me grace like that?', just as a certain elder said to St. Antony the Great, 'Father Antony, why is it that you labour less than I do, yet your glory is greater than mine?' To which St. Antony replied, 'Because I love God more than you do.'

And we should remember this, and remember, too, that the man who loves God loves his brother also, as St. John the Divine said;^{xv} and when anyone offends us, we must pray God for him as for ourselves; and this will then become a habit. We ourselves are infirm and weak, but the Lord is our help here, for He loves us greatly.

^{xv} cf. I John iv:21.

The Lord loves us so greatly that we cannot apprehend such love. We see the Cross, we know that He was crucified for us and suffered death, but still the soul is unable to understand the nature of this love, which is made known only through the Holy Spirit.

The grace of the Holy Spirit is so pleasant, and the mercy of the Lord so great, that they are beyond all description – the soul is simply drawn insatiate to Him, for she is consumed by love of the Lord, and wholly absorbed in God, and in Him finds perfect peace, and the world then is quite forgot. But the Lord in His mercy does not always give the same gift to the soul: sometimes He gives her love for the whole world, and the soul weeps for the whole world, and entreats her Good and Gracious Master that He pour out His grace and have mercy on every soul according to His compassion.

What shall I render unto Thee, O Lord,
for that Thou hast poured such great mercy on my soul?
Grant, I beg Thee, that I may see my iniquities,
and ever weep before Thee,
for Thou art filled with love for humble souls,
and dost give them the grace of the Holy Spirit.

O merciful God, forgive me.
Thou seest how my soul is drawn to Thee, her Creator.
Thou hast wounded my soul with Thy love,
and she thirsts for Thee, and wearies without end,
and day and night, insatiable, reaches toward Thee,
and has no wish to look upon this world, though I do
love it,
but above all I love Thee, my Creator,
and my soul longs after Thee.

O my Creator, why have I, Thy little creature,
grieved Thee so often? Yet Thou hast not remembered
my sins.

Let us turn back and speak of the same things again. Let us consider how each day we eat bread and drink water, yet on the morrow our bodies need drink and food again. In like manner the recollection of God's bounties never wearies the soul but disposes her still more to think on God. Or again: the more wood you pile on a fire, the more heat you get, and thus it is with God – the more you think on Him, the more are you fired with love and fervour towards Him.

If people only knew what the Lord's love was, they would flock to Christ, and He would warm all men with His grace. His compassion is beyond words. From love of God the soul forgets the earth.

The Lord dearly loves the sinner that repents, and tenderly presses him to His breast, and says, 'Where wert thou, My child? Long have I awaited thee.' The Lord calls all men to Himself in the words of the Gospels, and His voice is heard throughout the universe: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and I will give you rest.^{xvi} Come and drink of the waters of life. Come unto me and know that I love you. Were it not so I would not call you. I cannot suffer that a single one of my sheep should perish. And for one sheep the Shepherd goes into the mountains to seek him.

'Come unto me, my sheep. I created you and loved you. My love for you brought me down to the earth, and I suffered all things for your salvation, and my desire is that you should know my love and say, like the Apostles on Mount Tabor: "Lord, it is good for us to be with thee." '^{xvii}

Glory be to the Lord God that He gave us His Only-begotten Son for the sake of our salvation.

Glory be to the Only-begotten Son that He deigned to be born of the Most Holy Virgin, and suffered for our salvation, and gave us His Most Pure Body and Blood to eternal life, and sent us His Holy Spirit on earth.

^{xvi}. Matt. xi:28.

^{xvii}. Matt. xvii:4; Mark ix:5; Luke ix:33.

The Holy Spirit reveals to us the mysteries of God. The Holy Spirit teaches the soul ineffable love toward mankind. The Holy Spirit so adorns soul and body that man becomes like unto the Lord in the flesh, and in heaven will live for ever with the Lord, and behold His glory. In the life eternal all men will be like unto the Lord. And no man could know of this mystery, were it not revealed by the Holy Spirit. The Lord is joyful and radiant, and men shall shine forth like Him, as the Lord Himself said, 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun,'^{xviii.} and St. John the Divine says that we shall be like Him.^{xix.}

The souls of the saints, O Lord, hast Thou drawn unto Thyself, and they flow toward Thee like gentle streams.

The minds of the saints attached themselves to Thee, O Lord, and are drawn toward Thee, our Light and joy.

The hearts of Thy saints are confirmed in Thy love, O Lord, and cannot forget Thee for a moment, even when they sleep, for sweet is the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Of His compassion the Lord gave us sinners the Holy Spirit, and sought naught of us in return, but says unto each, as He said to His Apostle Peter, 'Lovest thou me?'^{xx.} Thus all that the Lord asks of us is our love, and He rejoices when we turn to Him. This is God's mercy to man: let a man cease sinning, and humble himself before God, and the Lord has mercy upon him and forgives him all, and gives him the grace of the Holy Spirit and the power to overcome sin.

Here is a thing to marvel at: We look with distaste upon our fellow-man – a human being just like ourselves – if he is poor or dirty, but the Lord, like a loving mother with her children, forgives us all things, and does not turn from the sinner in loathing but even gives him the gift of the Holy Spirit.

^{xviii.} Matt. xiii:43.

^{xix.} I John iii:2.

^{xx.} John xxi:15, 16, 17.

If men only knew the Lord's love for us they would surrender heart and soul to His holy will, and live peacefully in God, like children of a king. A king has manifold concerns: his kingdom, his family, his son, his children; but the son lives carefree in the palace, with servants to wait upon him, taking no thought and enjoying all things. Thus is it with the man who has submitted himself to God's will – he lives at peace, content with his lot though he be ill, poor, persecuted. He is at peace because the grace of the Holy Spirit is with him, and the delights of the Holy Spirit solace him, and his only sorrow is that he has so grieved his beloved Lord.

Ah, we should live our lives on earth in such fashion that the soul is always aware of abiding with God! The Lord said, 'I will not leave you comfortless,'^{xxi.} and gave us the Holy Spirit, and the soul must feel that the Divine Spirit lives in her – though she have but little grace, the soul is still conscious of the Lord's love, feels that the Lord is ours and we are His. But the man with whose soul this is not so has lost grace.

The soul feels that the Lord loves her despite the multitude of her sins. Just as in those days the Lord said to Zacchaeus: 'Zacchaeus, to day I must abide at thy house'^{xxii.} (and that only because Zacchaeus had wanted to see Christ), so it is now with the sinner when his soul turns to God. Nowadays the nations have forsaken the good path, and people have hardened their hearts and become pitiless, and there is no love in them, and so they are not conscious of God's love. In the hardness of their hearts they think that God, too, is without pity, like themselves, and sometimes they entirely lose their faith in God.

O, if only it were possible I would show them the Lord and say, 'Behold and see what the Lord is like! The face of His love melts the soul of man.' But this love is not to be

^{xxi.} John xiv:18.

^{xxii.} Luke xix:5.

discerned simply by the mind: it is made known through the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, grant me tears to shed for myself,
and for the whole universe,
that the nations may know Thee and live eternally with
Thee.
O Lord, vouchsafe us the gift of Thy humble Holy Spirit,
that we may apprehend Thy glory.

My soul grieves, weeping in sorrow for people who do not know the sweetness of a holy and softened heart. My soul burns with longing for the mercy of the Lord to be with all men, for the whole wide universe and all mankind to know how dearly the Lord loves us, like beloved children.

X

We are Children of God and in the Likeness of the Lord

The Lord created man from dust but he loves us as a father loves his children, and waits with longing for us to come to Him. The Lord so loved us that for our sakes He was made flesh, and shed His Blood for us and gave us to drink thereof, and gave us His most holy Body; and thus we are become His children, of His Body and Blood, and are in the likeness of the Lord in the flesh, as children to the end are like their fathers, and the Divine Spirit is witness to our spirit, that we shall be with Him to all eternity.

The Lord never ceases calling us to Himself: 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.'ⁱ He nourishes us with His most holy Body and Blood. In His mercy He schools us by His Word and the Holy Spirit. He has revealed His mysteries to us. He lives in us and in the sacraments of the Church, and leads us to where we shall behold His glory. But this glory shall each man behold according to the measure of his love. The more a man loves, the more ardently does he set his face towards God, yearning to be with the Beloved Lord, and therefore will he approach the nearer to Him; while the man who loves but little will have but little desire for the Lord, and the man who does not love at all will neither wish nor aspire to see the Lord, and will spend his life in darkness.

I weep for people who do not know God, who do not know

ⁱ Matt. xi:28.

His mercy. But to us the Lord shewed Himself through the Holy Spirit, and we live in the light of His holy commandments.

Behold, a wondrous thing! Grace gave me to know that all men who love God and keep His commandments are fulfilled with light and are in the likeness of the Lord; whereas those who go against God are full of darkness and in the likeness of the enemy.

And this is natural. The Lord is Light, and He enlightens His servants, whereas they who serve the enemy have accepted the darkness of the enemy.

I once knew a boy who looked like an angel. He was submissive and gentle. His little face was pink and white; his clear blue eyes shone kind and tranquil. But when he grew up he began to lead a bad life, and lost the grace of God; and so by the time he reached the age of thirty, he looked a mixture of man and devil, wild beast and cut-throat, and the whole appearance of him was ruthless and dreadful.

I knew a girl, too, who was very beautiful – her face was so radiant and lovely that many were envious of her beauty. But through sin she lost grace, and then it was painful to look at her.

But I have also seen the reverse. I have seen men arrive in the Monastery with faces disfigured by sin and passion, but with repentance and a devout life they changed and became good to look upon.

Another time the Lord let me see a priest, as he stood hearing confessions, in the image of Christ. Though his hair was white with age, his face looked young and beautiful like the face of a boy, so inexpressibly radiant was he. In the same way I once saw a bishop during the Liturgy. I also saw Father John of Kronstadt, by nature an ordinary-looking man until grace gave his face the beauty of an angel and made one want to gaze at him.

Thus sin disfigures a man while grace beautifies him.

Man is made of the dust of the earth but God so loved him that He adorned him with grace, and fashioned him in the likeness of the Lord.

It is sad that, because of our pride, so few of us know this. Whereas if we were to humble ourselves the Lord would disclose this mystery to us, for He loves us dearly.

The Lord said to His Apostles: 'Children have ye any meat?'ⁱⁱ. What love these words reveal! But the Lord loves not only the Apostles but every one of us like that.

When the Lord was told, 'Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee,' He answered and said, 'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.'ⁱⁱⁱ

There are people who declare that God does not exist. They say this, because a proud spirit lives in their hearts, deceiving them with lies about Truth and the Church of God. They think themselves clever, whereas in point of fact they do not even see that these thoughts they have are not theirs but proceed from the enemy; but whoever welcomes such thoughts into his heart, cherishing them, identifies himself with the evil spirit and will be like him. And God forbid that anyone should die in such a state!

But in the hearts of the Saints lives the grace of the Holy Spirit, making them kin with God, and they feel without a doubt that they are spiritual children of the Heavenly Father, and therefore say, 'Our Father.'^{iv}

The soul rejoices and is exceeding glad at these words. By the Holy Spirit she knows that the Lord is our Father. Created of earth though we be, the Holy Spirit dwells in us and makes us in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the same way that children are like their fathers.

ⁱⁱ. John xxi:5.

ⁱⁱⁱ. Matt. xii:47–50.

^{iv}. cf. Rom. viii:15–16; Gal. iv:6–7.

Man was formed of the dust of the ground – what good thing can there be in him?

But behold, God in His loving-kindness adorned man with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and he became after the likeness of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Great is this mystery, and great the mercy of God towards man!

If all the peoples of the earth knew how dearly the Lord loves man, their hearts would be filled with love for Christ and Christ's humility, and they would seek to be like Him in all things. But man cannot do this by himself – it is only in the Holy Spirit that he can be like unto Christ. The man that is fallen purifies himself through repentance, and is made new by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and in all things becomes like unto the Lord.

So great is God's mercy towards us!

We thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast given us the Holy Spirit on earth, to teach the soul knowledge the which she never thought to know.

The Holy Spirit instructs us in the humility of Christ, that the soul may ever carry within her the Divine grace which gladdens her and at the same time fills her with sadness for mankind; and she weeps and prays that all peoples may know the Lord and find delight in His love.

The man who has come to know the love of God through the Holy Spirit knows rest neither by day nor by night, and though his body succumbs and he would fain lie on his pallet, even there the soul, unwearying, reaches up in longing towards God, her Father. The Lord made us kin with Him. 'Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee: may they also be one in us.'^v Thus the Lord by the Holy Spirit makes us one family with God the Father.

^v cf. John xvii:21.

XI

On the Mother of God

When the soul abides in the love of God – how good and gracious and festive all things are! But even with God's love, sorrows continue and the greater the love, the greater the sorrow. Never by a single thought did the Mother of God sin, nor did she ever lose grace, yet vast were her sorrows; when she stood at the foot of the Cross her grief was as boundless as the ocean and her soul knew torment incomparably worse than Adam's when he was driven from paradise, in that the measure of her love was beyond compare greater than the love which Adam felt when he was in paradise. That she remained alive was only because the Lord's might sustained her, for it was His desire that she should behold His Resurrection, and live on after His Ascension to be the comfort and joy of the Apostles and the new Christian peoples.

We cannot attain to the full the love of the Mother of God, and so we cannot thoroughly comprehend her grief. Her love was complete. She had an illimitable love for God and her Son but she loved the people, too, with a great love. What, then, must she have felt when those same people whom she loved so dearly, and whose salvation she desired with all her being, crucified her beloved Son?

We cannot fathom such things, since there is little love in us for God and man.

Just as the love of the Mother of God is boundless and passes our understanding, so is her grief boundless and beyond our understanding.

O holy Virgin Mary, tell us, thy children,
of thy love on earth for thy Son and God.
Tell us how thy spirit rejoiced in God thy Saviour.
Tell us of how thou didst look upon His fair countenance,
and reflect that this was He
Whom all the heavenly hosts wait upon in awe and love.
Tell us what thy soul felt when thou didst bear
the wondrous Babe in thine arms.
Tell us of how thou didst rear Him,
how, sick at heart, thou and Joseph sought Him
three long days in Jerusalem.
Tell us of thine agony
when the Lord was delivered up to be crucified,
and lay dying on the Cross.
Tell us what joy was thine over the Resurrection.
Tell us how thy soul languished after the Lord's Ascension.

We long to know of thy life on earth with the Lord but
thou wast not minded to commit all these things to writing,
and didst veil thy secret heart in silence.

Many are the marvels and mercies that I have witnessed at
the hands of the Lord and of the Mother of God but there
is naught I can render in return for this love of theirs.

What could I give our most holy sovereign Lady for
coming to me and bringing enlightenment, instead of turning
away in loathing for my sin? I did not behold her with
my eyes but the Holy Spirit gave me to know her through
her words, which were filled with grace, and my spirit
rejoices and my soul leaps to her in love, so that the mere
invocation of her name is sweet to my heart.

Once when I was a young novice I was praying before an
ikon of the Mother of God, and the Jesus Prayer entered into
my heart and there began to repeat itself of its own accord.
And another time in church I was listening to a reading from
the prophet Isaiah, and at the words, 'Wash you, make you

clean,^{i.} I reflected, 'Maybe the Mother of God sinned at one time or another, if only in thought.' And, marvellous to relate, in unison with my prayer a voice sounded in my heart, saying clearly, 'The Mother of God never sinned even in thought.' Thus did the Holy Spirit bear witness in my heart to her purity. But during her earthly life even she was not quite perfect and complete – she did make some mistakes that did not involve sin. We can see this from the Gospel when on the return from Jerusalem she did not know where her Son was, and together with Joseph sought Him for three days.^{ii.}

My soul trembles and is afraid when I consider the glory of the Mother of God.

Small and of no account is my mind, poor and sickly my heart, but my soul rejoices and would fain set down if but a little concerning her.

My soul fears to touch upon this matter but love constrains me not to conceal my thankfulness for her compassion.

The Mother of God committed to writing neither her thoughts nor her love for God and her Son, nor her soul's suffering at the Crucifixion, because in any case we could not have understood, for her love for God is stronger and more ardent than the love of the Seraphim and Cherubim, and all the hosts of angels and archangels marvel at her.

And though the life of the Mother of God is hidden, as it were in a holy silence, our Lord allows our Orthodox Church to know that she embraces the whole world in this love of hers, and in the Holy Spirit sees all the peoples of the earth, and like her Son pities all men and has compassion on them.

O, if we might only know the love of the most holy Mother of God for all who keep the commandments of Christ, and how she pities and sorrows over sinners who do

^{i.} Isaiah i:16.

^{ii.} cf. Luke ii:44–46.

not reform! I had experience of this myself. Of a truth I say, speaking before God, Whom my soul knoweth: in spirit I know the Most Pure Virgin. I never beheld her but the Holy Spirit gave me to know her and her love for us. Were it not for her compassion I would have perished long ago but she was minded to come to me and enlighten me, so that I should not sin. This is what she said: 'It is painful for me to look upon thee, at what thou doest.' And her words, soft, quiet and gentle, wrought upon my soul. Over forty years have gone by since then but my soul can never forget those sweet words, and I know not what return to make for such love towards my sinful self, nor how to give thanks to the good and forbearing Mother of God.

Verily is she our advocate before God, and alone the sound of her name rejoices the soul. But all heaven and earth, too, rejoice in her love.

Here is a wondrous thing which passes understanding: she dwells in heaven and ever beholds the glory of God, yet she does not forget us, poor wretches that we are, and spreads her compassion over the whole earth, over all peoples.

And this most pure Mother of His, the Lord has bestowed on us. She is our joy and our expectation. She is our Mother in the spirit, and kin to us by nature, as a human being, and every Christian soul leaps to her in love.

XII

On the Saints

‘I love them that love me, and them that honour me I will honour,’ⁱ saith the Lord.

God is glorified in the Saints, while the Saints are glorified by God. The glory which the Lord gives the Saints is so exceeding great that were men to see a saint as he really is, they would fall on their faces in veneration, for man in the flesh is unable to bear the manifestation of heavenly glory.

Be not astonished at this. The Lord so loved His creation that He gave man abundantly of the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit man became like unto God.

But wherefore does the Lord so love man? Because He is love itself; and this love is made known through the Holy Spirit.

By the Holy Spirit does man come to know the Lord, his Creator, and the Holy Spirit with His grace fills his entire being – his soul, his mind and his body.

The Lord gave the Saints His grace, and they loved Him and clung to Him utterly, for the sweetness of the love of God does not allow of love for the world and its beauty.

And if it be thus here on earth, how much closer will the Saints in heaven be united to the Lord in love! And this love is ineffably sweet and proceeds from the Holy Spirit, and all the heavenly hosts are nourished thereon.

God is love; and the Holy Spirit in the Saints is love.

By the Holy Spirit is the Lord made known. By the Holy

ⁱ Proverbs viii:17; I Sam. ii:30.

Spirit is the Lord magnified in heaven. By the Holy Spirit the Saints glorify God, and with the gifts of the Holy Spirit does the Lord give glory to the Saints, and this glory shall have no end.

To many people the Saints seem far removed from us. But the Saints are far only from people who have distanced themselves – they are very close to them that keep Christ's commandments and possess the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In heaven all things live and move in the Holy Spirit. But this same Holy Spirit is on earth, too. The Holy Spirit dwells in our Church; in the sacraments; in the Holy Scriptures; in the souls of the faithful. The Holy Spirit unites all men, and so the Saints are close to us; and when we pray to them they hear our prayers in the Holy Spirit, and our souls feel that they are praying for us.

How happy and blessed are we Orthodox Christians, that the Lord has given us life in the Holy Spirit; and He makes glad our souls. But we must guard Him soberly – a single evil thought and He forsakes the soul, and then the love of God is no longer with us – we have no more assurance in prayer, and no firm hope that we shall receive that for which we ask.

The Saints live in another world, and there through the Holy Spirit they behold the glory of God and the beauty of the Lord's countenance. But in the same Holy Spirit they see our lives, too, and our deeds. They know our sorrows and hear our ardent prayers. In their lives they learned of the love of God from the Holy Spirit; and he who knows love on earth takes it with him into eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven, where love grows and becomes perfect. And if love makes one unable to forget a brother here, how much more do the Saints remember and pray for us!

The Lord bestowed the Holy Spirit on the Saints, and in the

Holy Spirit they love us. The souls of the Saints know the Lord and His goodness toward man, wherefore their spirits burn with love for the peoples. While they were still on earth they could not without sorrow hear tell of sinful men, and in their prayers shed tears for them.

They were chosen of the Holy Spirit to pray for the whole world, and the Holy Spirit gave them a well-spring of tears. The Holy Spirit gives His chosen such a wealth of love that their souls burn as it were with a flame, in their desire that all men should be saved and behold the glory of the Lord.

The holy Saints have attained the Kingdom of Heaven, and there they look upon the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ; but by the Holy Spirit they see, too, the sufferings of men on earth. The Lord gave them such great grace that they embrace the whole world with their love. They see and know how we languish in affliction, how our hearts have withered within us, how despondency has fettered our souls; and they never cease to intercede for us with God.

The Saints rejoice when we repent, and grieve when men forsake God and become like brute beasts. They grieve to see people living on earth and not realising that if they were to love one another, the world would know freedom from sin; and where sin is absent there is joy and gladness from the Holy Spirit, in such wise that on all sides everything looks pleasing, and the soul marvels that all is so well with her, and praises God.

Call with faith upon the Mother of God and the Saints, and pray to them. They hear our prayers and know even our inmost thoughts.

And marvel not at this. Heaven and all the Saints live by the Holy Spirit and in all the world there is naught hidden from the Holy Spirit. Once upon a time I did not understand how it was that the holy inhabitants of heaven could see our lives. But when the Mother of God brought my sins home

to me I realised that they see us in the Holy Spirit, and know our entire lives.

The Saints hear our prayers and are possessed from God of the strength to help us. The whole Christian race knows this.

Father Roman told me that when he was a boy he had to cross the river Don in winter, and his horse fell through the ice and was just about to go under, dragging the sledge with it. He was a little boy at the time, and he cried at the top of his voice: 'St. Nicholas, help me pull the horse out!' And he tugged at the bridle and pulled the horse and sledge out from under the ice.

And when Father Matthew, who came from my village, was a little boy he used to graze his father's sheep, like the prophet David. He was no bigger than a sheep himself. His elder brother was working on the other side of a large field, and suddenly he saw a pack of wolves rushing at Misha – Father Matthew's name in the world – and little Misha cried out, 'St. Nicholas, help!', and no sooner had the words left his lips than the wolves turned back and did no harm either to him or his flock. And for a long time after that the people of the village would smile and say, 'Our Misha was terribly frightened by a pack of wolves but St. Nicholas rescued him!'

And we know of many an instance where the Saints come to our help the moment we call upon them. Thus is it evident that all heaven hears our prayers.

The Saints are like unto the Lord but so are all men in His likeness who keep Christ's commandments; whereas those who give in to their passions, and do not repent, are like unto the enemy. I think that if this mystery were made known, people would cease to serve the enemy, and everyone would aspire with all his might to know the Lord and be like unto Him.

The Saints were people just like all of us. Many of them started with grievous sins but through repentance they attained to the Kingdom of Heaven. And everyone who reaches the Kingdom of Heaven does so through repentance, which the Merciful Lord granted us by His sufferings.

In the Kingdom of Heaven where dwell the Lord and His most pure Mother, abide all the Saints. There live our holy Forefathers and Patriarchs who valiantly carried their faith before them. There dwell the Prophets who received the Holy Spirit, and by their exhortations called the people to God. There dwell the Apostles who died that the Gospel might be preached. There dwell the Martyrs who gladly gave their lives for love of Christ. There dwell the holy Prelates who followed the Lord's example and took upon themselves the burden of their spiritual flock. There dwell the holy Fathers who lived lives of prayer and fasting, and those who assumed folly for Christ's sake, all of whom fought the good fight and thereby overcame the world. There dwell all the righteous who kept God's commandments and vanquished their passions.

Thither aspires my soul – to that wondrous-holy assembly which the Holy Spirit has gathered together. But woe is me! Inasmuch as I lack humility, the Lord does not give me the strength to fight, and my feeble spirit flickers out like a tiny candle, whereas the spirit of the Saints burned with a bright flame, which the wind of temptation not only failed to extinguish but set burning more fiercely than ever. They trod the earth and worked with their hands but their spirits continued with God, of Whom they were ever mindful. For the love of Christ they endured every affliction on earth, and feared no suffering, and thus glorified the Lord. Wherefore the Lord loved them and glorified them, and granted them the eternal Kingdom with Him.

XIII

Concerning Shepherds of Souls

As the Gospel tells us, after the Lord's Ascension the Apostles returned (to Jerusalem) 'with great joy.'ⁱ

The Lord knows what joy He gave them: and their souls experienced this joy.

That they had known the true Lord Jesus Christ was their first joy.

Their second joy – that they loved Him.

Their third joy – that they had known life eternal in heaven.

And their fourth joy – that they desired salvation for the world, as for themselves.

And later on they rejoiced because they came to know the Holy Spirit, and witnessed the workings of the Holy Spirit in themselves.

The Apostles walked the earth, speaking to the peoples concerning the Lord and the Kingdom of Heaven. But their souls wearied and thirsted to behold their beloved Lord, and therefore they had no fear of death but met death gladly, and if they were content to live on earth, it was only for the sake of the people to whom their love had gone out.

The Apostles loved the Lord, wherefore they feared no suffering. They loved the Lord and they loved the people, and this love removed all fear from them. They feared neither suffering nor death, and for this reason the Lord sent them out into the world to enlighten men.

ⁱ Luke xxiv:52.

And to this day there are monks who experience the love of God and reach out to it day and night. And they help the world by their prayers and writings. But this is the concern above all of the pastors of the Church whose inner grace is so exceeding great that were men able to see the glory of this grace, the whole world would wonder at it; but the Lord has veiled it that His servants should not be puffed up but find salvation in humility.

The Lord calls His bishops to feed His flock, and gives them freely of the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is said that the Holy Spirit stablished the bishops in the Church, and in the Holy Spirit they have the power to bind and to remit sins. And we are the sheep of the Lord's flock whom He loved unto the end and to whom He gave our holy pastors.

They are heirs to the Apostles, and by the grace accorded them they bring us to Christ. They teach us repentance; they teach us to keep the Lord's commandments. They proclaim the word of God, that we may know the Lord. They guide us along the path of salvation, and help us to climb the heights of the lowly spirit of Christ. They gather the afflicted and straying sheep of Christ into the Church's fold, that their souls may find rest in God.

They pray to God for us, that we may all be saved. As the friends of Christ they are able to entreat and be heard of the Lord, attaining humility and the grace of the Holy Spirit for the living, forgiveness of sins for the dead, and for the Church peace and freedom from bondage.

They carry the Holy Spirit within them, and through the Holy Spirit forgive us our sins. By the Holy Spirit they know the Lord, and like the angels they contemplate God. They are strong to tear our minds from the earth and attach them to the Lord.

They grieve when they see us grieving God and preventing the Holy Spirit from dwelling in us. All the troubles of the earth lie on their shoulders, and their souls are carried away with love of God. They pray without cease, beseeching

comfort for us in our afflictions, and peace for the whole world.

By their ardent prayers they draw us, too, to serve God in a spirit of humility and love.

For their own humility and love for the people, the Lord loves them. Inasmuch as they continue in great toil and struggle, they are enriched by the wisdom of the Saints, whose example they seek to follow in their own life.

The Lord so loved us that He suffered on the Cross for us; and His sufferings were so great that we are unable to apprehend them because we love the Lord so little. Likewise do our spiritual pastors suffer on our account, although we often do not see their sufferings. And the greater a pastor's love, the greater are his sufferings; and we who are His sheep should understand this, and love and revere our pastors.

Brethren, let us dwell in obedience to our pastors, and then there will be peace in the world, and the Lord through the Holy Spirit will abide with us all.

Truly noble is a priest – the minister at God's altar. Whoever gives offence to him offends the Holy Spirit Who lives in him.

And what shall I say of a bishop? To bishops is given great grace of the Holy Spirit. They are placed highest of all men. Like eagles they soar aloft and there contemplate infinite expanse, and by their understanding of things divine they feed Christ's flock.

The Holy Spirit, we are told, set up bishops in the Church to feed the Lord's flock.ⁱⁱ Were men to remember this, they would love their pastors even with a great love, and their souls would rejoice at the sight of a pastor. He who bears within him the grace of the Holy Spirit will know what I mean.

ⁱⁱ cf. Acts xx:28.

A certain gentle and good man was out walking with his wife and their three children. A bishop, riding in a carriage drove by, and when the peasant began reverently to bow to the bishop he saw him, in the act of blessing, enveloped in a fire of grace.

But one of you may ask, 'If the Holy Spirit established the bishops, and governs them, how is it peace does not reign among us, and why do we not prosper?'

The answer is, because we have wrong ideas about authority as established by God, and so we turn disobedient. But were we to submit ourselves to the will of God, we would soon flourish, since the Lord loveth the humble obedient soul, and Himself is her guide; but as for the disobedient soul – in His patience and mercy He waits for her to mend her ways. In His omniscience the Lord instructs the soul by His grace, like a kind teacher and father. But even a father can make mistakes, whereas the Lord is always faithful and true; and a teacher is not versed in all things, whereas the Lord is all-knowing.

The trouble is that we do not consult our elders, who have been set over us to guide us. And pastors do not turn to God when they would know how to act. Had Adam sought the counsel of the Lord when Eve gave him to eat of the fruit, the Lord would have enlightened him and he would not have sinned. And for myself, I can say that all my sins and errors came about because in the hour of temptation and necessity I did not call upon the Lord; but now I have learned to entreat God's mercy, and the Lord preserves me because of the prayers of my spiritual father.

Thus is it with bishops and prelates – although they possess the gift of the Holy Spirit they do not have a proper understanding of all things, and so in the hour of need they should seek enlightenment from the Lord; but they act according to their own understanding, thereby offending against God's compassion and sowing confusion. St. Seraphim said that when he gave advice according to his own personal ideas

mistakes would occur; and mistakes can often be small but they can also be big. Therefore we must all learn to find out the will of God; and if we do not try to learn, this path will never be known to us.

The Lord said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'ⁱⁱⁱ The Lord through the Holy Spirit enlightens man; but without the Holy Spirit, not a single man can discern aright. Until the coming of the Holy Spirit even the Apostles were neither strong nor wise, so that the Lord said to them,

'How long shall I suffer you?'^{iv}.

The Lord gave His Holy Church pastors, and they officiate in the image of Christ, and to them is given power to forgive sins through the Holy Spirit.

But perhaps you are thinking, 'How can this bishop or that spiritual father or priest, possess the Holy Spirit when he is so fond of his food, and has other failings?' But I say to you, 'It is possible if he does not harbour evil thoughts; so that though there be some iniquity in him, it does not prevent grace from dwelling in his soul, in the same way as a tree in foliage may have some withered branches but they do no harm and the tree bears fruit; or there may be tares in a field full of wheat but they do not stop the wheat from growing.'

Concerning Spiritual Fathers

At Vespers during one Lent at the Monastery of Old Russikon-on-the-Hill the Lord allowed a certain monk to see Father Abraham, a priest-monk of the strict rule, in the image of Christ. The old confessor, wearing his priestly stole, was standing hearing confessions. When the monk entered the confessional he saw that the grey-haired confessor's face looked young like the face of a boy, and his

ⁱⁱⁱ. Ps. l:15.

^{iv}. Matt. xvii:17.

entire being shone radiant and was in the likeness of Christ. Then the monk understood that a spiritual father ministers in the Holy Spirit, and the sins of the repentant sinner are forgiven him by the Holy Spirit.

If people could behold in what glory a priest celebrates the Divine Office they would swoon at the sight; and if the priest could see himself, could see the celestial glory surrounding him as he officiates, he would become a great warrior and devote himself to feats of spiritual endurance, that he might not offend in any way the grace of the Holy Spirit living in him.

As I pencil these lines my spirit rejoices that our pastors are in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we, the flock, though we have grace but in small measure – we, too, are in the likeness of the Lord. Men ignore this mystery but St. John the Divine told us clearly: ‘We shall be like him,’^v and this not only after death but even here and now, for the merciful Lord has given the Holy Spirit on earth, and the Holy Spirit lives in our Church, lives in all virtuous pastors; lives in the hearts of the faithful. The Holy Spirit teaches the soul to fight the good fight; gives the strength necessary to fulfil the commandments of the Lord; establishes us in all truth; and has so adorned man that he has become like unto the Lord.

We must always bear in mind that a father-confessor performs the duties of his office in the Holy Spirit, wherefore we must venerate him. Know this, brethren, that if anyone should die with his confessor present, and, dying, say to him: ‘O holy father, give me thy blessing that I may behold the Lord in the Kingdom of Heaven,’ and the confessor should answer, ‘Go, child, and look upon the Lord,’ it would be with him according to the confessor’s blessing, for the Holy Spirit both in heaven and on earth is one and the same.

^v. I John iii:2.

Great power lies in the prayers of a spiritual father. For my pride I suffered much from devils but the Lord humbled and had mercy on me because of my spiritual father's prayers, and now the Lord has revealed to me that the Holy Spirit dwells in our father-confessors, wherefore I hold them in deep respect. Because of their prayers we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, and joy in the Lord, Who loves us and has given us all things needful for our soul's salvation.

If a man does not open his heart to his confessor, his will be a crooked path that leads not to salvation; whereas he who keeps nothing back will go straightway to the Kingdom of Heaven.

A monk once asked me, 'Tell me, what must I do to amend my life?' He was very fond of his food and ate unseasonably. So I told him, 'Write down each day how much you have eaten, and the thoughts you had, and in the evening read out what you have written to your confessor.' He answered me, 'I could not do that.'

So then he was unable to surmount the trifling shame of confessing his weakness, and thus he did not right himself, and died of a stroke. May the Lord pardon our brother and preserve us from a like death!

Whoever would pray without ceasing must have fortitude and be wise, and in all things consult his confessor. And if your father-confessor has not himself trodden the path of prayer, nevertheless seek counsel of him, and because of your humility the Lord will have mercy on you, and keep you from all wrong. But if you think to yourself, 'My confessor lacks experience and is occupied with vain things, I will be my own guide with the help of books,' your foot is set on a perilous path and you are not far from being beguiled and going astray. I know many such who reasoned thus and so deceived themselves, and they did not thrive because they despised their confessors. They forgot that the saving grace of the Holy Spirit is at work in the sacrament

of confession. In such wise does the enemy delude those who fight the good fight – the enemy would have no men of prayer – while the Holy Spirit gives good counsel to the soul when we hearken to the advice of our pastors.

Through the father-confessor the Holy Spirit operates in the sacrament (of confession), and this is why the soul, on leaving her confessor, feels renewed through peace and love for her neighbour. But if you are troubled when you leave your confessor, it means that you have not made a clean confession of your sins, and have not in your soul forgiven your brother his transgressions.

A confessor should rejoice when the Lord brings him a soul for repentance, and according to the grace given to him he should heal that soul, wherefore he will receive great mercy from God, as a good shepherd of his sheep.

XIV

Concerning Monks

There are people who say that monks ought to be of some use in the world, and not eat bread they have not toiled for; but we have to understand the nature of a monk's service and the way in which he has to help the world.

A monk is someone who prays for the whole world, who weeps for the whole world; and in this lies his main work.

But who is it constrains him to weep for the whole world?

The Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, incites him. He gives the monk the love of the Holy Spirit, and by virtue of this love the monk's heart forever sorrows over the people because not all men are saved. The Lord Himself so grieved over people that He gave Himself to death on the Cross. And the Mother of God bore in her heart a like sorrow for men. And she, like her beloved Son, desired with her whole heart the salvation of all.

The same Holy Spirit the Lord gave to the Apostles, to our holy Fathers and to the pastors of the Church. This is how we serve the world. And this is why neither pastors of the Church nor monks should busy themselves with secular matters but should seek to be like the Mother of God, who in the Temple, in the 'Holy of Holies', day and night pondered the law of the Lord and continued in prayer for the people.

It is not for the monk to serve the world with the work of his hands. That is the layman's business. The man who lives in the world prays little, whereas the monk prays constantly. Thanks to monks, prayer continues unceasing on earth, and

the whole world profits, for through prayer the world continues to exist; but when prayer fails, the world will perish.

And what could a monk achieve with his hands? Supposing he earned a rouble or two a day – what would that be to God? In the same length of time a single thought pleasing to God works miracles. We see this in the Scriptures.

The prophet Moses prayed in his heart and the Lord said unto him, ‘Moses, wherefore criest thou unto me?’ⁱ and delivered the Israelites from destruction. St. Antony the Great aided the world by his prayers, not with the work of his hands. St. Sergius by fasting and prayer helped the Russian people to free themselves from the Tartar yoke. St. Seraphim prayed silently, and the Holy Spirit descended on Motovilov. And this is the task of the monk.

But if a monk be lukewarm and indifferent, and has not arrived at a state wherein his soul continually contemplates the Lord, then let him wait upon pilgrim travellers and assist with his labours those who live in the world. This, too, is pleasing to God. But rest assured that it is not the monastic life by a long way.

A monk must wrestle with his passions, and with God’s help vanquish them. At times he rests happy in the Lord, and abides, as it were, with God in paradise, but at others he weeps for the whole world, since his desire is for all men to be saved.

Thus has the Holy Spirit schooled the monk to love God and to love the world.

Perhaps you will say that nowadays there are no monks like that, who would pray for the whole world; but I tell you that when there are no men of prayer on the earth, the world will come to an end and great calamities will befall: they have started already.

The world is supported by the prayers of the Saints; and the monk’s calling is to pray for the whole world. This

ⁱ Exod. xiv:15.

is his task, and therefore do not burden him with earthly considerations. A monk must live in a constant state of abstinence, but if he is concerned with worldly cares he will be obliged to eat more; and this is to the general detriment because when he eats more he is no longer able to pray as he ought to, for grace would have a lean body for a dwelling-place.

The world thinks that monks are a useless species. But this is not the right way to think. The world does not know how a monk prays for the whole universe – people do not see his prayers and how they are received of the Lord in His mercy. Monks wage a vigorous warfare against the passions, and for this warfare they will be great in the sight of God.

Myself, I am not worthy to be called a monk. I have spent over forty years in the monastery and count myself among those at the start of their novitiate; but I know monks who live close to God and to the Mother of God. The Lord is so close to us – closer than the air we breathe. Air must pass through the body to reach the heart, whereas the Lord lives within the heart of man: ‘I will dwell in them and walk in them . . . And I will be their Father, and they shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Here lies our joy: God is with us and in us.

Do all men know this? Alas, not all but only those who have humbled themselves before God and put off their own wills, for God resists the proud, and dwells but in the lowly heart. The Lord rejoices when we are mindful of His mercy and seek to be like Him in our humility.

Just as the hearts of Luke and Cleopas burned within them when the Lord walked with them on their way,ⁱⁱⁱ so in our day the hearts of many monks burn with love for the Lord, and their souls in lowliness of spirit and in love cleave to the

ⁱⁱ. cf. II Cor. vi:16–18.

ⁱⁱⁱ. cf. Luke xxiv:32.

One and Only God. But a monk with a predilection for money or possessions, or in general for any earthly thing, cannot love God as he ought, because his mind is divided between God and the things of this earth, and the Lord has said that we cannot serve two masters. And so the minds of them that live in the world are busied with the things of the world, wherefore they cannot love God in the way that monks love Him.

Though a monk takes thought for earthly things, so far as is needful for the life of the body, his spirit burns with love for God; though he labour with his hands, in mind he continues with God. The holy Apostles preached the word to the people but their souls were always with God, for the Divine Spirit lived in them and guided their minds and hearts. It is likewise with a monk: physically he lives in a small, poor cell but his spirit contemplates the majesty of God. He will keep a conscience pure in all things, careful lest he offend his brother in any manner, careful lest he grieve the Holy Spirit within him by any kind of evil impulse. He humbles his soul, and by humility he repulses the enemy from himself and from those that ask his prayers.

There are monks who know God, know the Mother of God, too, and the holy angels, and paradise; but they are also acquainted with devils and the torments of hell; and these things they know through experience.

In the Holy Spirit does the soul come to know God. So far as this is possible, the Holy Spirit gives man even here on earth to know the fulness of the joy of paradise, which the man without the grace of God cannot endure but must die.

From such experience the monk wages war against prideful enemies, and the Holy Spirit is his Teacher, enlightening him and giving him strength to vanquish them. The wise monk by his humility repels all self-conceit and pride. He says to himself,

'I am not worthy of God and paradise. I deserve the

torments of hell, and shall burn in fire for ever. I am verily the worst of men and unworthy of mercy.'

The Holy Spirit teaches man to think thuswise of himself; and the Lord rejoices in us when we humble and condemn ourselves, and He gives the soul His grace.

He who has humbled himself has conquered the enemy. *No enemy can come near* the man who in his heart esteems himself deserving of eternal fire. No earthly thoughts find place in his soul – heart and mind he lives entirely in God. And the man who has come to know the Holy Spirit, and learned humility of Him, has become like to his Teacher, Jesus Christ, Son of God, and resembles Him.

All we followers of Christ who are chosen of God, monks especially, are engaged in conflict with the enemy. We are at war, and our combat continues every day, every hour. And the enemy will not get the better of the man who wants to subdue his own will; to defeat the enemy, we must learn the humility of Christ; and the soul that has acquired this humility has vanquished the enemy.

But let us not despair, for the Lord is boundless in His mercy, and loves us.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit God makes known to the soul the prayer which is in the first state, the prayer which is in the second, and the prayer which is perfect. But even the prayer that is perfect the Lord hearkens to, not because the soul is perfect but because He is merciful and, like a loving mother, would cheer the soul that she burn still more ardently and know rest neither by day nor by night.

To be pure and unsullied, prayer requires inner peace but peace cannot exist in the soul without obedience and self-denial.

The holy Fathers ranked obedience above fasting and prayer, since a man who knows not obedience may think of himself as a spiritual wrestler and man of prayer, whereas he who has excised his self-will and put himself under obedi-

ence in all things to his *staretz* and his confessor has an unfettered mind.

A monk who is not obedient never comes to know what pure prayer is. Though he spend a hundred years in a monastery, he who is fastuous and fond of his own way will never gain any knowledge of things spiritual, for carelessness to obey offends against our *startzy* and through them offends God.

Woe unto the monk who hearkens not to his *startzy*! It were better for him to have remained in the world. But even in the world people listen to their parents and respect their elders, submit to their superiors and are subject to authority.

Woe unto us. The Lord, King of heaven and earth and all creation, humbled Himself and bore obedience to His Mother and St. Joseph, whereas we are unwilling to listen to our *staretz*, whom the Lord loves and into whose care He has committed us. Though a *staretz* be ill-grained, and this be a great trial to his disciple, still the disciple must pray to God for him in humbleness of spirit, and the Lord will then have mercy on them both.

Not all monks are peaceable: either their 'obedience'^{iv} is not right or they have wretched cells, or their *staretz*^v is

^{iv}. In this instance by 'obedience' is meant the task or office laid upon the monk.

^v. In the Russian Church generally the term *staretz* (plural: *startzy*) is used primarily to denote those who have long and unremitting experience of the spiritual struggle, whose manifold feats of self-denial have gained them the gift of discernment, and who finally are able through prayer to arrive at the will of God for a man – that is, have in some degree or another received the gift of insight, and so are able to give spiritual instruction to those who turn to them.

But on Mt. Athos the term *staretz* used in the sense of a title has assumed another and, as it were, a local meaning. In the Russian communal hermitage of St. Andrew the Apostle the Abbot is called '*Staretz*'. In the 'cells' (that is to say, the small cloisters dependent on one or another monastery) the cloister prior is likewise called '*staretz*'. The members of the Council or Assembly of *Startzy* are called the Synodal *Startzy*. Elderly monks long practised in the spiritual struggle are often in general referred to as '*startzy*'.

difficult to get on with. But they do not see that neither cell nor 'obedience' nor *staretz* is to blame but that their own souls are ailing. Nothing pleases the proud soul but to the lowly in spirit all things are good.

If you have a poor superior, pray for him and you will find peace in your soul. If your cell is a wretched one, or your task not to your liking, or you are burdened with sickness, reflect thus to yourself: 'The Lord seeth me and knoweth my estate. Therefore God must be willing to have it so;' and then you will be at peace. The soul that will not submit to God will nowhere find peace, much fasting and prayer notwithstanding. The man who holds it against people for having upbraided him does not realise that it is his own ailing soul, not the censure, that is wrong. The man who enjoys his own will has no wisdom whatsoever but he who is all obedience will soon thrive because the Lord loveth him. He who possesses the grace of the Holy Spirit, even in small measure, loves every authority set up by God, and joyously submits to such authority to the glory of God. These things have been made known to our Church by the Holy Spirit, and the Fathers have written of them.

It is impossible to preserve peace of soul unless we watch over our minds – that is, unless we repel every thought displeasing to God and, contrariwise, cling to those thoughts that are pleasing to Him. Look into your heart and see what is happening there – do you find peace or not? If not, examine yourself to know in what you have transgressed. If we are to have peace of soul we must live soberly, for our bodies,

In the Monastery of St. Panteleimon monks under obedience call their Superior – that is, the elder in charge of the workshop or the duties appointed to a monk – *staretz* as a sign of respect. In time the Monastery came to adopt the honorary title for senior monks in the workshops and other departments.

This last, local, monastic meaning of the word is the one Staretz Silouan here has in mind.

too, can cause us to lose grace. We must not be inquisitive – we should not read newspapers or secular books which lay waste the soul and bring about faint-heartedness and confusion. Do not criticise others. (People will often speak ill of a man without knowing him, whereas, in fact, in his mind he is like the angels.) Do not seek to know what does not concern you: have thought only for the task set by your *startzy*, and the Lord will then succour you with His grace because of your obedience, and you will witness in your soul the fruits of obedience, which are peace and unceasing prayer. Living in a Community, we more often lose grace because we have not learned to love our brethren according to the Lord's commandment. If your brother offend against you, and you feel anger, or you condemn or detest him, you will find that grace has fled and peace departed. To have peace of soul we must school ourselves to love the man who has offended us, and forthwith pray for him. There can be no peace for the soul unless she pray the Lord with all her might for the gift of love towards all men. The Lord said, 'Love your enemies,'^{vi} and if we will not love our enemies, we shall know no peace in our souls. At all costs we must strive after obedience, humility and love: otherwise all our spiritual feats and vigils will count for nothing. A certain *staretz* had this vision: he saw a man pouring water into a trough, the bottom of which was all holes. The man laboured and laboured but the water always ran out and the trough did not fill. So it is with us: we may live in a state of constant endeavour but if we neglect this or that virtue our souls remain a desert.

O my brethren, soldiers of Christ, do not let us grow indolent in our prayers and strivings – let us be zealous all our lives long. I have known many monks who came to the Monastery, souls aflame, but who later lost their first ardour;

^{vi} Matt. v:44; Luke vi:27, 35.

but I know others who preserved their original zeal to the end.

To preserve our ardour we must have the Lord ever in mind, and say to ourselves, 'My end has come, and now I am to appear before God's Judgment-seat.' And if the soul is thus constantly prepared for death, she will have no more fear of death but will turn to humble prayer of repentance, and where the spirit is contrite the mind will be cleansed and no longer seduced by the world, and you will love all men and shed tears for all. But when this is given you, know that it is a gift of God's mercy, and that man in himself is nought but sinful clay.

I have seen good men enter the Monastery who afterwards degenerated; and I have also seen others who arrived dissolute but later became so humble and meek that the very sight of them rejoiced the soul. I know one monk who used to make a detour round his village when he was young, in order to avoid temptation, and who not long ago contemplated the world for two hours with fervour, and told me himself that now he could love the world. Thus may the soul of a monk change and regard the world. And yet this monk had entered the Monastery as a seventeen-year-old lad and spent thirty-five years in the Cloister. This shows us how we must live in fear of that fire being quenched which impelled us to forsake the world and to love the Lord.

Many monks know the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is so sweet and dear to the soul that the fairest of maidens will not stir a man to desire; but he who has grace in soul only still fears sin, since he is aware of sin within him still, and the passions still attract him.

We monks are engaged in spiritual warfare. A soldier on his way to Salonika once came to see me in the storehouse. Love sprang up in my soul for him, and I said, 'Pray that there be less sorrow and affliction.' And he replied, 'War taught me to pray. Many a time have I been in fierce battles,

with grape-shot bursting all round, but I didn't get killed. I prayed to God this way: "Lord, have mercy!" ' I looked at him as he showed me how he prayed, and I could see how his whole being went into his prayer; and the Lord preserved him.

The soldier prayed like that in the extremity of war where the only victim is the body but we monks wage a different kind of war – one that is within us and may destroy the soul. Wherefore it is necessary for us to pray more, and more fervently, that the soul may be with the Lord. We should not only hasten to Him but steadfastly abide in Him. Just as the angels perpetually serve God in spirit, so, too, must the mind of the monk ever dwell in God, and day and night meditate the law of God.

The law of God is like a large, beautiful garden, where dwells the Lord with all His Saints: the prophets, the apostles, the holy prelates and martyrs, the holy fathers who kept humble fast – all gathered together in wondrous wise by the clemency of God; and the soul rejoices in this holy, mighty and marvellous assembly.

Many people would like to see and know a king, who is a mere mortal; but to know the Lord, the King of eternal glory, is more precious than anything.

O brethren, read more of the Gospels, the Epistles of the Apostles and the works of the holy Fathers! Through such reading does the soul come to know God, and the mind becomes so occupied with the Lord that the world is quite forgot, as if you had never been born into it.

The Lord gave us the Gospels and would have us follow their teaching, but the Lord teaches us by His grace as well; though not all men are able to understand this – only those rare beings who have humbly divested themselves of their own wills. We others must ask of our holy confessors, and they will lead us to Christ because to them is given the grace

to bind and to remit. Approach your confessor with faith and you will receive paradise.

It is well for a monk to be obedient and make clean confession of his sins, that his confessor may know the thoughts favoured by his soul. Such a monk will always live at peace in God, and divine thoughts will come to birth in his soul, thoughts which will enlighten his mind, while his heart rests in God.

He will live on earth amidst pitfalls and temptations of every kind, and fear nothing, for his soul is confirmed in God and filled with love for Him, and all his desire is to humble himself, inasmuch as the Lord loveth a humble soul, and the soul knows the Lord's will for her, since He Himself is her Teacher.

Even in our times there are still many who fight the good fight and are pleasing in God's sight, though they perform no visible miracles.

But here is a miracle of God which we may observe in our own soul: to the duly humbled soul the Merciful Lord gives great joy, melting the heart; but the slightest propensity to pride, and the soul falls into despondency and gloom. But only those who wage the struggle know of this.

If you came to the Cloister loving the Lord, though but in small measure, and if you thought to yourself that the Lord has led you there and that He directs your *staretz*, then the grace of the Lord will take up its abode in you, and the Lord will give you peace and wisdom to discern good and evil, and your soul will pursue what is good every day and every hour, because she delighted in God's law.

If you have entered the Community, be of good courage and let not your soul be troubled.

If you serve in the Guest-house, be like to Abraham who was deemed worthy of entertaining the three wondrous Strangers. Wait on fathers and brethren and pilgrims in

humility and joy, and you will receive the reward of Abraham.

If you are working with the brethren and suffer temptation, be like those who assumed folly for God's sake: they prayed for those who put temptation in their way, and for this love of theirs the Lord gave them the grace of the Holy Spirit, and so it was easy for them to live with people, and bear with every affliction. As to the monk under obedience – though he be not always heedful, the Lord is merciful to him; but the disobedient man by his own disobedience drives the grace of God from himself.

If you are living in silence in your cell, have as your pattern the silence of Arsenius the Great, that the Holy Spirit may steer the vessel which is your soul.

If it goes hard with you, remember the Lord's merciful words, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'^{vii} This rest in the Holy Spirit, the soul receives in return for repentance.

The Lord loves the man who seeks Him with his whole heart, for He said, 'I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find grace.'^{viii} And this grace draws the soul to seek God with tears.

On being Steward of a Monastery

A great many monks declare that a Monastery Steward has no time to pray, and cannot preserve quiet in his soul, since all day long he must be in contact with people. But I tell you that if he will love people, and say to himself when he thinks of his workers, 'The Lord loveth His creation,' the Lord will give him prayer without cease, for to the Lord all things are possible.

A Monastery Steward must have love and compassion for his workers, and pray for them thus:

'O Lord, gladden the afflicted souls of these poor people.

^{vii}. Matt. xi:28.

^{viii}. Proverbs viii:17.

Send down on them Thy Spirit, the Holy Comforter,' and then his soul will live in a quiet desert, and the Lord will give him compassion and tears in his prayers, and he will be sensible of the grace of the Holy Spirit within him, and his soul will be clearly aware of God's help.

Once in our Monastery the Steward wanted to send one of the workers out on an errand but the poor man, who had no experience, did not want to go. The Steward told him to get along, and the man fell into a rage in front of everyone – some forty people were present – and called the steward names. But the latter took pity on him and gave him some tea and sugar, and said, 'Always speak to me like that.' And the man was suddenly so ashamed of himself that his face flushed scarlet, and from then on no one was more docile than he.

Thus it is well to live in love: the Lord then succours us with His grace and gives us the gift of ardent prayer for mankind. But when a steward is bad-tempered he will harm his own soul and trouble others by his anger.

Long years of experience have shown that a steward should love people as a mother loves her children, and if anyone is rebellious he should earnestly pray God for him, 'O Lord, give Thy servant understanding: Thou lovest him,' and then his prayer will profit him for whom it is offered, and the steward himself will learn how good it is to pray for his workers.

Everyone will like a good steward because men like being kindly treated. Experience has shown that we should not think evil of anyone, for if we do, the grace of the Holy Spirit will forsake the soul. Whereas if we love people the Lord will give us the gift of prayer, in such wise that even in a crowd the soul will be able continually to lift up her voice to God.

XV

Concerning Obedience

Rare are they who know the mystery of obedience. The obedient man is great in the sight of God. He follows in the footsteps of Christ, Who in Himself gave us the pattern of obedience. The Lord loves the obedient soul and affords her His peace, and then all is well and the soul feels love towards all men.

The obedient man has put his whole trust in God, wherefore his soul dwells continually in God, and the Lord gives him His grace; and this grace instructs him in every good thing, and gives him the strength to abide in goodness. He sees evil but evil does not approach his soul, for the grace of the Holy Spirit is with him, which preserves him from all sin, and he is at peace, and prays to God unburdened.

The obedient soul is beloved of the Holy Spirit, and soon knows the Lord and receives the gift of prayer of the heart.

The obedient man has surrendered himself to God's will, wherefore he is given the gifts of freedom and rest in God, and he prays with mind untrammelled; but the proud and disobedient cannot pray with a single mind, however austere they may live. They know neither the manner of the working of grace nor whether the Lord has forgiven them their sins. But the obedient man is conscious without a shadow of doubt that his sins are forgiven him, because he feels the presence of the Holy Spirit in his soul.

The spirit of obedience is necessary not only in monks but in everyone else, too. Even the Lord was obedient. The proud and those who are a law unto themselves prevent the

indwelling of grace and therefore never know peace of soul; whereas the grace of the Holy Spirit enters with ease into the soul of the obedient, bringing joy and quiet.

All men seek after rest and joy but few know where to find this joy and rest, or what is required to attain them. There is a monk I have seen for thirty-five years, soul ever glad and face ever pleasant, though he is old now. This is because he is devoted to obedience. His soul is given over to God's will, and he knows not a care in the world. Filled with love for the Lord, his soul contemplates Him.

He who bears within him even a small measure of grace will submit joyously to all authority. He knows that God rules over both heaven and earth and the nether regions, over himself and his affairs, over everything in the world, and therefore he is always tranquil.

The obedient man has given himself over to the will of God and has no fear of death, for his soul is accustomed to live with God, and loves God. He has excised his own will and so neither in soul nor body is he troubled by the conflict which torments the rebellious and self-willed.

The truly obedient man detests his own will and loves his spiritual father, and for this he receives freedom to pray to God with undistracted mind, and his soul is free without let or hindrance to contemplate God, and rest in Him. On account of his humility and the prayers of his spiritual father he soon arrives at the love of God.

Our manner of living is simple but requires wisdom. The Mother of God said to St. Seraphim, 'Lay upon them [nuns] obedience, and those who are obedient, wise and circumspect will be with you and close to me.'

You see how simple a matter is salvation. But wisdom must needs be learned by long experience. Wisdom is given of God for obedience. The Lord loveth the obedient soul, and where the Lord loveth He giveth whatsoever the soul may ask of God. As of old, so now, too, does the Lord hearken to our prayers and grant our supplications.

Why did the holy Fathers set obedience above fasting and prayer?

Because feats of spiritual endeavour without obedience foster vainglory, whereas the obedient novice is simply doing as he is told and has no occasion to pride himself on what he does. Moreover, the obedient man has excised his self-will completely, and only heeds his spiritual father, wherefore he is free from every care, and can pray with an undistracted mind. When a man lives in obedience, his mind is entirely taken up by God and the precepts of his *staretz*; whereas the man who does not know obedience is concerned with all sorts of things and in mind is critical of his *staretz*, and so cannot contemplate God.

I know a certain monk on whom obedience had laid a heavy burden. He had the gift of the prayer of the heart, and the Lord gave him tears to weep for the whole world; and the Abbot told him: 'This is given to you because of your obedience.'

Obedience preserves a man from pride. For obedience he receives the gift of prayer and the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is why obedience ranks above fasting and praying.

Had the angels (the fallen angels) observed obedience, they would have continued in heaven, ever singing the glory of the Lord. And had Adam not disobeyed, both he and his seed with him would have remained in paradise.

But even now it is possible to regain paradise through repentance. The Lord loves us dearly, despite our sins, if only we will humble ourselves and love our enemies.

But he who loves not his enemies will never find peace, even though he were to be set down in paradise.

XVI

Concerning Spiritual Warfare

Everyone who would follow our Lord Jesus Christ is engaged in spiritual warfare. The Saints by long experience learned from the grace of the Holy Spirit how to wage this war. The Holy Spirit appointed their footsteps and gave them understanding and the strength to overcome the enemy; but without the Holy Spirit the soul is incapable even of embarking on the struggle, for she neither knows nor understands who and where her enemies are.

Blessed are we Orthodox Christians because we live under the protection of God's mercy. It is not difficult for us to wage this war: the Lord had pity on us and gave us the Holy Spirit, Who abides in our Church. Our only sorrow is that not everyone knows God and how greatly He loves us. The man who prays is conscious of this love, and the Spirit of God bears witness in his soul to salvation.

Our battle rages every day, every hour.

If you have upbraided, or passed judgment on, or vexed your brother, your peace is lost. If you have been boastful, or have exalted yourself above your fellow, you have lost grace. If you did not drive away forthwith the wanton thought that came to you, your soul will lose love for God and boldness in prayer. If you are fond of power, or money, you will never know the love of God. If you have followed your own will, then you are vanquished by the enemy and despondency will come upon your soul. If you detest your brother, it means that you have fallen away from God, and an evil spirit has taken possession of you.

But if you will do good unto your brother, you will gain quiet for your conscience. If you subdue your own will, your enemies will be driven off and you will receive peace in your soul.

If you forgive your brother the affronts he puts upon you, and love your enemies, then you will receive forgiveness for your sins, and the Lord will give you to know the love of the Holy Spirit.

And when you have entirely humbled yourself, you will find perfect rest in God.

When the soul is humbled, and the Spirit of God is in her, man blissfully rejoices in spirit in the love of God. The soul when she feels the Lord's mercy knows no fear of any earthly calamity – her longing is to abide forever in humility before God, and to love her fellow-men. But if a soul be puffed up, then her day of rejoicing is over, for grace forsakes her and she can no longer pray with a pure heart, and evil thoughts come to harass her.

Why is it that man suffers on earth and is beset by affliction and adversity?

We suffer because we lack humility. The Holy Spirit dwells in the humble soul, bringing freedom, peace, love and blessedness.

We suffer because we do not love our fellow-men. The Lord said, 'Love one another and ye shall be my disciples.'ⁱ God's love comes with loving one's brother. Sweet is the love of God, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit and made known in full only through the Holy Spirit. But there is a lesser degree of love, to be found in the man who strives to observe Christ's commandments and goes in fear of grieving God in any way; and this love, too, is good. Every day we must urge ourselves towards what is good, and with might and main seek after the humility of Christ.

ⁱ cf. John xiii:35.

The Lord said to His disciples, 'My peace I give unto you.'ⁱⁱ

We must entreat God for this peace of Christ's, and the Lord will give to him who asks; and when we receive it, we must watch over it with care, and seek to multiply it. But whoever has not submitted to the will of God in times of distress cannot know God's compassion.

If misfortune overcome you, do not lose heart but recollect that the Lord in mercy looketh upon you, and do not allow yourself to think, 'Is the Lord going to look upon me when I grieve Him?', for *mercy* is the nature of the Lord. Instead, turn to God in faith, and like the prodigal son say, 'I am no more worthy to be called thy son,'ⁱⁱⁱ and you will see how pleasing you will be to the Father, and your soul will be filled with joy indescribable.

People do not try to learn humility, and because of their pride are unable to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, and so the whole world is filled with suffering. Whereas if men but came to know the Lord and how merciful, humble and meek He is, the face of the whole world would be changed *in a single hour*, and great joy and love would reign in every heart.

The merciful Lord has given us repentance, and through repentance are all things put right. Through repentance we receive forgiveness of sins; repentance brings the grace of the Holy Spirit, and thus we come to know God.

If one among you has lost grace and things go hard with him, let him repent, and the Lord will give him His peace.

If a people or a nation are in tribulation, all must repent, and then God will set everything right.

Our entire struggle is to humble ourselves. Our enemies fell because of pride, and would induce us on to the same path.

ⁱⁱ. John xiv:27.

ⁱⁱⁱ. Luke xv:19.

But no, brethren, let us humble ourselves and then we shall behold the glory of the Lord while here on earth,^{iv} for the Lord gives the humble man to know Him by the Holy Spirit.

The soul that has tasted of the sweetness of the love of God is reborn and quite changed, and loves her Lord, and with all her strength aspires after Him day and night, and for a while stays peaceful in God, and then begins to grieve again over the people.

The merciful Lord sometimes gives the soul peace in God but sometimes makes the heart ache for the whole wide universe, that all men might repent and enter paradise. Having come to know the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, the soul longs for it to be given to all men, for the sweetness of the Lord will not suffer the soul to be selfish but bestows on her love which springs from the heart.

Therefore let us love the Lord, Who first loved and suffered for us.

I will not hide from you the things for which the Lord gives His grace. Nor shall I write overmuch but I entreat you – love one another, and you will behold the mercy of the Lord. Let us love our fellows, and the Lord will love us. Think not, O my soul, that the Lord loveth thee if thou lookest askance upon any man. Rather is it that thou art beloved of the devils, in that thou hast become their servant; but be not slow to repent, and ask the Lord for strength to love thy brother, and then thou wilt see that there is peace in thy soul.

With all your might ask the Lord for humility and brotherly love, for to him who loves his brother the Lord giveth freely of His grace. Try yourself: one day ask God for brotherly love, and the next day live without love, and you will see the difference. The spiritual fruits of love are manifest – peace and joy in the soul, with all men dear to

^{iv} cf. Matt. xvi:28; Mark ix:1.

you, and you will shed abundant tears for your fellow-man and for every thing that hath breath, and all creation.

Often a single sympathetic greeting will work a happy change in the soul; while, contrariwise, one unfriendly look – and grace and the love of God depart. When that happens, make haste to repent, that the peace of God may return to your soul.

Blessed is the soul that has come to love the Lord and learned humility of Him. The Lord loves the meek in spirit who firmly put their trust in God. Such a one feels God's mercy at every instant, so that though he be discoursing with those around him, his soul is taken up with his beloved Lord. Long struggle against the enemy has brought him to prize humility above all else, and he will not suffer the enemy to rob him of his love for his brethren.

If we will love our brethren with all our might, and strive to humble our souls, victory will be ours, for the Lord bestoweth His grace above all for brotherly love.

It was only given to me to experience the fulness of the grace of the Holy Spirit – I am unable to capture it again.

Alas that I did not live a good life in my young years, and follow in the steps of my patron saint, Simeon Stylites. His was a wonderful life. He was seven years old when the Lord appeared to him, and forthwith he recognised the Lord, and asked Him, 'Lord, how wast Thou crucified?' The Lord stretched forth His hands and said, 'Thus did they crucify Me; but it was My desire. And do thou crucify thyself with Me every day.'

Thus must we urge ourselves all our lives to do good, and above all must we forgive others their trespasses, and the Lord will then not be mindful of our own sins, and will give us the grace of the Holy Spirit.

When I was in the world I used to like forgiving people from the bottom of my heart, and I forgave easily and would willingly pray for those who offended me; and when I

entered the Monastery, as a novice I received a great measure of grace, and this grace taught me to love my enemies.

St. John the Divine declares that God's commandments 'are not grievous'^v but a light burden. But they are light only where there is love – if love is not present, *everything is difficult*. Therefore, preserve love, do not lose it, for though it is possible to recover love, this can only be at the cost of much weeping and praying, and without love, life on earth is hard. To continue in malice means death to the soul, from which may the Lord preserve us.

When a soul whom the Lord has sought out and favoured with His grace loses this grace for whatever reason, she mourns grievously, and longs to find it again, entreating the Master day and night to forgive her and pour out His mercy upon her anew. Who can describe her sighing, her tears, her genuflexions? For long years the soul is at pains to seek the grace she had tasted of and delighted in. And it may happen that the Lord will sorely try the soul, whether she be faithful to Him; while the soul, not finding within her the sweetness she had known, thirsts for it afresh and humbly waits, drawn constantly to God by the fire of her love.

When grace is present, it is easy to love God and pray day and night; but the wise soul will endure arid periods, too, trusting firmly in the Lord and knowing that He will not confound her hopes but will turn to her in His good time. The grace of God is sometimes swift to come, sometimes long withheld; but the wise soul will humble herself and love her neighbour and meekly bear her cross, and thus overcome the attempts of the enemy to sever her from God.

When her sins, like clouds, hide the light of God's compassion the soul, though she thirst for the Lord, remains feeble and helpless, like a bird prisoned in a cage, unable to

^v I John v:3.

escape to the green grove whither it would fly in liberty to sing the praises of God.

Long was I in torment, ignorant of the ways of the Lord, but now, after many years and much tribulation, through the Holy Spirit I have come to know God's will. All things whatsoever the Lord commanded^{vi} must be scrupulously fulfilled, for this is the path to the Kingdom of Heaven, where we shall behold God. But do not think about seeing God: rather, humble yourself and let your thought be that at your death you will be cast into a dark prison and there languish and pine for the Lord. When we weep and humble our souls, the grace of God preserves us; whereas if we forsake weeping and humility, we may be led astray by intrusive thoughts or visions. The humble soul neither sees nor desires to see visions but prays God with an undistracted mind; whereas the mind that is puffed up is not free from intrusive thoughts and imaginings, and may even reach the point of beholding devils, and discoursing with them. I write of this because myself I have been in a like unhappy state.

Twice have I been beguiled. The first time was at the very beginning, when I was a young novice, and came about because of my inexperience, and the Lord was swift to forgive me. But the second occasion was due to pride, and that time I suffered long torment before the Lord healed me for the sake of my spiritual father's prayers. It all befell after I had accepted a certain vision. I revealed this vision to four men wise in spirit, and not one of them told me that what I had seen was of the enemy, though vainglory had me in its clutches. But afterwards I came to understand where I had gone wrong, for devils started appearing to me again, not only at night but during the day, too. My soul saw them but was not afraid because I felt the grace of God with me. And thus for many years I suffered from them, and had the

^{vi} cf. Matt. xxviii:20.

Lord not given me to know Him through the Holy Spirit, and had it not been for the help of our gracious and most-holy Lady, I would have despaired of my salvation; but now my soul trusts firmly in God's compassion, though according to my deeds I am deserving of torment both here on earth and in hell.

For a long while I was unable to make out what had befallen me. I thought to myself, 'I do not find fault with people; I harbour no evil thoughts; I perform my task of obedience punctually; I fast; I pray without ceasing – why, then, do devils frequent me? I see I am in error but cannot fathom where. I say my prayers, and the devils go away for a time, but afterwards come back again.' And long my soul continued in this conflict. I talked about it to some of the *startzy*. They kept silent. And I remained at a loss.

And lo, one night I was sitting in my cell when suddenly it was filled with devils. I started to pray fervently, and the Lord drove them away, but they came back again. Then I got to my feet ready to bow down before the ikons, with devils all round me and one of them standing out in front so that I could not bow down before the ikons without appearing to be bowing to him. I sat down again, and said:

'Lord, Thou seest that I desire to pray to Thee with a single mind but the devils will not let me. Tell me what I must do to make them leave me.'

And in my soul came the Lord's reply:

'The proud always suffer thus from devils.'

'Lord,' I say, 'Thou art merciful. My soul knoweth Thee. Tell me what I must do that my soul may grow humble?'

And the Lord answered me in my soul:

'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.'

O the compassion of God! I am an abomination to God and man, yet the Lord so loveth me, giveth me understanding and healeth me, and Himself doth teach my soul humility and love, patience and obedience, and hath poured out the fulness of His mercy upon me.

Since then I have stayed my mind in hell and I burn in the sombre fire, yearning after the Lord and seeking Him in tears, and saying:

‘Soon shall I die and take up my abode in the dark prison of hell. And alone shall I burn there, and long for the Lord, and lament: ‘Where is my Lord, Whom my soul knoweth?’

And I had great profit from these thoughts: my mind was cleansed and my soul found rest.

O wonder! The Lord bade me stay my mind in hell and not despair. So close is He to us: ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,’^{vii.} and ‘I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me.’^{viii.}

As soon as the Lord lays His hand upon the soul, she becomes a new being, but this is intelligible only to those who know by experience, for without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to come to knowledge of what is of heaven, and this Spirit on earth is given of the Lord.

Who shall describe the joy of knowing the Lord and reaching out toward Him day and night, insatiable? O how blessed and happy are we Christians! There is nothing more precious than to know God; and nothing worse than not to know Him. But he, too, is blessed who, though he does not know, yet believes.

I began to do as the Lord taught me, and my soul was rejoiced by rest in God, and now day and night I entreat Him for the humility of Christ. O this humility of Christ! I know what it is though I cannot acquire it. I know it from the grace of God but I cannot describe it. I seek it like a precious, lustrous pearl. It is pleasing to the soul, and sweeter than the whole world. I learned of this humility through experience. And do not be astonished at this. The Holy Spirit on earth dwells in us, and He enlightens us. He gives us to

^{vii.} Matt. xxviii:20.

^{viii.} Ps. 1:15.

know God. He gives us to love the Lord. He establishes our mind in God. He bestows on us the gift of words. He gives us to sing the praises of the Lord. He gives us joy and gladness.

The Holy Spirit gives us strength to wage war against the enemy, and be victorious.

I beseech all men – let us make haste to repent, and then we shall perceive the mercy of the Lord. And I beseech those who see visions and put their trust in them to understand that this is a source of pride and, side by side with pride, sweet vanity in which there is no lowly breath of repentance, and that is where the trouble lies, for without humility it is impossible to vanquish the enemy.

I myself was twice deluded. Once the enemy showed me light and the thought tempted me: Accept what you see, it proceeds from grace. Another time I accepted a vision and suffered greatly on that account. Once, at the end of Matins when the choir were singing ‘Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord,’ I heard King David in heaven singing the praises of God. I was standing in the choir and it seemed to me that there was neither roof nor dome, and that I was looking at the open sky. I spoke of this to four men of God but not one of them told me that the enemy had made mock of me, while myself I thought that devils could not be singing the praises of God, therefore my vision could not be from the enemy. But I was beguiled by vanity and began to see devils again. Then I knew that I had been deceived, and I made full disclosure to my confessor and asked him for his prayers; and because of his prayers I am now saved and ever beseech the Lord to grant me the spirit of humility. And were I to be asked what would I have of God – what gifts – I should answer: ‘The spirit of humility in which the Lord rejoices above all things.’ Because of her humility the Virgin Mary became the Mother of God, and is glorified in heaven and on earth above all others. She committed herself wholly

to God's will. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord,'^{ix} she said. And we must all try to do likewise.

For humility the soul receives rest in God but long application is necessary if we are to learn how to retain this peace. We lose it because we are not confirmed in humility. And the enemy beguiled me thoroughly. I would think to myself, 'My soul knows the Lord, knows His goodness, and how greatly He loves me, so how could I get evil thoughts?' And for a long time I could not understand, until the Lord showed me, and then I saw that pride is at the root of wrong thoughts.

One inexperienced young monk suffered from devils, and when they fell upon him, he fled and they pursued him.

If it happen to you likewise, take courage, humble yourself and say, 'O Lord, have mercy on me, a wicked sinner,' and the devils will disappear. But if you are faint-hearted and flee, they will pursue you to the pit. Remember that in the hour when devils fall upon you, the Lord is looking down on you, to see how you put your trust in Him.

If you see Satan clearly, and he is going to singe you with his fire and would take your mind captive, again have no fear but hope firmly in the Lord and say, 'I am the worst of men,' and the enemy will leave you.

If you feel an evil spirit working in you, even then do not quail but confess yourself fully, and earnestly entreat a lowly spirit from the Lord, and the Lord will give it you without fail and then, according to the measure of your humility you will be sensible of grace within you, and when your soul finally humbles herself, then you will attain perfect rest.

And this war man wages his life long.

The soul that has come to know the Lord through the Holy Spirit does not take fright if afterwards she suffer beguilement, but remembering the love of God, and know-

^{ix}. Luke i:38.

ing that conflict with the enemy is loosed upon her because of her vanity and pride, she humbles herself and begs the Lord for healing, and the Lord heals – sometimes swiftly, sometimes slowly and gradually. The obedient man who puts his trust in his confessor and not in himself will quickly be healed of any harm done to him by the enemy, whereas the man lacking obedience will not reform.

The soul's war with the enemy continues until death. And whereas in ordinary warfare only the body suffers, in our war, which is harsher and more dangerous, the soul may perish.

On account of the pride in me the Lord twice let the enemy create strife in me, in such wise that my soul stood in hell; and I can say that if she be valiant, a soul will hold out, but if not, she may perish for all eternity. To all who may find themselves in the misfortune which overtook me I write now: Stand fast; hope firmly in God, and the enemy will not keep ground, for the Lord hath overcome him. By the grace of God I know that the Lord mercifully cares for us, and not one prayer, not a single good thought, is lost with God. The Lord often seems not to hear us; but that is only because we are proud and what we ask for would not be for our good. Pride is difficult to detect in oneself but the Lord leaves the proud to be tormented by their impotence until they humble themselves. But when the soul humbles herself, the enemy is vanquished, and the soul finds profound quiet in God.

Twice have I been in the Holy Spirit, and twice in great trouble and grievous temptation. On one occasion because of my pride the grace of the Holy Spirit went from me, and I felt like a brute beast in human form. My mind had not forgotten God but my soul had grown empty, like an animal. I began to repent, and grace returned. This lasted three days.

I also underwent the experience of not knowing in time

of prayer whether I was in the body or outside the body, but my soul contemplated God.

And so now I know from experience what it means to be in the Holy Spirit and what it means to be without Him.

O brethren, if you could conceive of the anguish of the soul that has known the Holy Spirit and afterwards lost Him! It is an intolerable aching – the soul then suffers indescribable grief and sorrow.

This, indeed, is the pain Adam knew after he was banished from paradise.

Who is there can realise what paradise is? He who bears within him the Holy Spirit can realise it in part, since paradise is the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit in heaven and on earth is one and the same.

I was thinking to myself, I am an abomination and deserving of every punishment; but instead of punishment the Lord gave me the Holy Spirit. O sweet is the Holy Spirit above all earthly things! Nourishment celestial is the Holy Spirit, the joy of the soul.

If you would be sensible of the grace of the Holy Spirit within you, then humble yourself like the holy Fathers. Pimen the Great said to his disciples, 'Be sure, my children, that where Satan is, there shall I be also.' The cobbler of Alexandria used to think to himself, 'Everyone will be saved – I alone shall perish,' and the Lord revealed to Antony the Great that he did not measure up to that cobbler. The holy Fathers waged vigorous war against the enemy, and were wont to think humbly of themselves, wherefore the Lord loved them.

The Lord gave me also to understand the force of these sayings. And when I keep my mind in hell, my soul is at rest, but when I forget to do so, thoughts displeasing to God assail me.

I would reason like this: I am earth, and sinful earth. But the Lord manifested His mercy to me without stint, and

bestowed much grace on me, and my spirit rejoices that, abominable though I am, nevertheless the Lord loves me, and therefore my soul is drawn insatiably towards Him; and when I find Him I shall say to my soul, 'Look to it that thou lose it not, "lest a worse thing come unto thee," 'x for the torment is great when the soul loses the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Believe what I say, for I write before the face of the Lord Whom my soul knoweth. To preserve grace, one must humble oneself all the time. And those who do His work – the Lord Himself mercifully humbles them. Antony the Great reflected that he was the most mature and perfect of all those in the desert, but the Lord directed his steps to Paul the Theban, and in him St. Antony saw a man more mature and perfect than himself.

St. Zossima thought that as he had been a monk since childhood, no one could converse with him – but St. Mary of Egypt humbled him; and he saw that he was far from reaching her level.

The fool for Christ's sake humbled St. Tikhon of Zadonsk when he slapped his face and said, 'Stop this lofty philosophising!'

Thus does the Lord of his mercy humble the saints that they may continue in all humility. And all the more must we humble ourselves. And day and night I ask God for the humility of Christ. My soul thirsts to acquire it. It is the sublime gift of the Holy Spirit. In the humility of Christ abides love, peace, gentleness, temperance, obedience, long-suffering – indeed, all the virtues are contained therein.

The humble man who bears within him abundant grace of the Holy Spirit, and preserves this grace, is possessed of great strength for any divine vision; whereas the man of little grace falls prone because he lacks the strength that grace brings with it.

* John v:14.

Thus on Mt. Tabor when the Lord was transfigured Moses and Elias stood and talked with Him, whereas the Apostles fell on their faces; but later, when the grace of the Holy Spirit had increased within them, they, too, remained standing when the Lord appeared to them, and they, also, were able to talk with Him.

So it was that St. Sergius stood before the Mother of God when she appeared to him in a vision, because the grace of the Spirit in him was great; whereas his disciple, Micah, fell on his face, unable to look upon her. Again, St. Seraphim of Sarov possessed the grace of the Holy Spirit in great measure, and remained standing when the Mother of God appeared to him, while his obedientiary fell on her face, because her measure of grace was less.

Likewise, if a man has grace within him, he is not afraid when he sees devils, since he feels in him the strength of God.

It is four o'clock in the morning. I sit in my cell as in a palace, in peace and love, writing. But when grace comes to me in great measure, I can write no more.

A Noble Lore

While we are on earth we must learn to wage war with the enemy. The hardest thing of all is to subdue the flesh for God's sake, and overcome self-love.

To overcome self-love we need to be for ever humbling ourselves. This is a *great science* not quickly to be mastered.

One must reckon oneself the worst of men, and condemn oneself to hell. In this way is the soul humbled and the tears of repentance are made to flow which give birth to joy. It is well to school the soul to reflect, 'I am going to burn in hell-fire.' But, alas, few understand this. Many there are who despair and fall by the wayside. Their souls sink into a wild state, and then they have no desire to pray, to read, or even to think on God.

In his soul man must condemn himself but not despair of

the compassion and love of God. He must acquire a lowly and contrite spirit, and then all intrusive thoughts will depart and his mind be purified. But at the same time he must know his own capacity, so as not to overburden his soul. Learn to know yourself, and see to it that your soul's endeavour is within her strength.

Not all souls are equally strong. Some are sturdy as stone, others frail as smoke. Those like smoke are the proud souls. As the wind bears smoke hither and thither, so does the enemy sway them whichever way he will, for either they have no patience or else are easily deceived. But the humble soul keeps the Lord's commandments and stands firm in them like a rock buffeted by the waves. The humble have surrendered themselves to the will of God and their minds are fixed on Him, and the Lord gives them the grace of the Holy Spirit.

He who lives according to the commandments is aware, every hour, every minute, of grace in his soul. Yet there are people who do not discern the advent of grace.

The man who has known the love of God will say to himself, 'I have not kept the commandments. Though I pray day and night, and strive to practise every virtue, still I fail in the commandment to love God. At rare moments only do I arrive at God's commandment, though at all times my soul longs to abide in it.' When irrelevant thoughts intrude into the mind, the mind is then concerned both with God and with them, and so the commandment to love God 'with *all* thy mind and *all* thy heart' is not fulfilled. But when the mind is entirely wrapped in God, to the exclusion of every other thought – that is to realise the first commandment, though again still not completely.

Love of God takes various forms. The man who wrestles with wrong thoughts loves God according to his measure. He who struggles against sin, and asks God to give him strength not to sin, but yet falls into sin again because of his

infirmity, and sorrows and repents – he possesses grace in the depths of his soul and mind, but his passions are not yet overcome. But the man who has conquered his passions now *knows no conflict*: all his concern is to watch himself in all things lest he fall into sin. Grace, great and perceptible, is his. But he who feels grace in both soul and body is a perfect man, and if he preserves this grace, his body is sanctified and his bones will make holy relics.

XVII

Concerning Intrusive Thoughts and Delusions

Beware these two thoughts, and fear them. The first suggests 'You are a saint;' the other, 'You will not be saved.' Both come from the enemy, and there is no truth in them. Instead, think to yourself, 'I am a great sinner but the Lord is merciful. He loves man with a great love, and will forgive me my sins.'

Believe in this way, and, you will see, the Lord will forgive you. But put no faith in feats of your own, however much you may have striven. An ascetic once said to me, 'I shall certainly be pardoned because I prostrate myself so many times a day;' but when death came, he rent his clothes.

Thus God has mercy on us, not for our achievements but gratis, because of His goodness. The Lord would have the soul humble, without malice, lovingly forgiving all men; then He, too, will forgive with joy. The Lord loves all men and we must be like Him and love everyone, and if we are not able to, then we must ask and the Lord will not refuse but will help us with His grace.

While still a novice I was given to know the love of God. It is indescribable. The soul feels that she is with God and in God, and the spirit rejoices in the Lord, though the body may swoon at the goodness of God. But this grace can be lost, and lost because of a single wrong thought.

Along with an evil thought, a hostile power enters into us, and then the soul is clouded, and evil thoughts harass her. Then is man conscious of his downfall, and sees that

without the grace of God he is nought but sinful, worthless clay.

Long experience teaches the soul to whom the Lord is known that if a man live according to the commandments he will feel grace within him, though but feebly, and have assurance in prayer; but should he sin in but a single thought, and not repent, grace will slip away, and then the soul pines and weeps before God.

Thus the soul spends her whole life waging war on intrusive thoughts. But do not be cast down over the struggle – the Lord loves a brave warrior.

Evil thoughts afflict the proud soul, and until she humbles herself she knows no rest from them. When wrong thoughts besiege you, call like Adam upon God, saying, ‘O Lord, my Maker and Creator, Thou seest how my soul is vexed with bad thoughts . . . Have mercy upon me.’ And when you stand before the face of the Master, steadfastly remember that He will give ear to all your supplications if they be for your good.

A cloud blows over and hides the sun, making everything dark. In the same way, one prideful thought causes the soul to lose grace, and she is left in darkness. But, equally, a single impulse of humility – and grace returns. This I have experienced and proved in myself.

Know this, that if you incline towards watching other people, to see who does what, this is a sign of pride.

Have a care – observe yourself, and you will see that as soon as the soul sets herself above her fellows, a bad thought unpleasing to God immediately follows. And then, unless the soul, realising this, humbles herself, she will be faced with some slight temptation. If a second time she fails to humble herself, a fierce struggle with lustful impulses will erupt. If she again fails to humble herself, she will fall into

some small degree of sin. Then, if she still fails in humility, her sin will be great. And so she will go on sinning until she has humbled herself. But so soon as she repents, the Merciful Lord will give her peace and melt her to tenderness, and all things evil will pass and all intrusive thoughts depart. But afterwards, let her hold fast to humility with all her strength, for otherwise she will fall into sin again.

When He sees that the soul has not stablished herself in humility, the Lord takes away His grace, but do not lose heart over this: grace is within you, only it is hidden. Train yourself to cut off an intrusive thought immediately. And if you forget, and fail to chase it away at once, then bring God your repentance. Be at pains over this, so that you acquire the habit. The soul is a creature of habit: according to the habit you have acquired, so will you act all the rest of your life.

The heart-stirrings of a good man are good; those of a wicked person are wicked; but everyone must learn how to combat intrusive thoughts, and turn the bad into good. This is the mark of the soul that is well versed.

How does this come about, you will ask?

Here is the way of it: just as a man knows when he is cold or when he feels hot, so does the man who has experienced the Holy Spirit know when grace is in his soul, or when evil spirits approach.

The Lord gives the soul understanding to recognise His coming, and love Him and do His will. In the same way the soul recognises thoughts which proceed from the enemy, not by their outward form but by their effect on her.

This is knowledge born of experience; and the man with no experience is easily duped by the enemy.

The enemy fell through pride and would have us fall likewise, tempting us to self-praise. And if the soul should hearken and accept, grace will withdraw until she humble herself. And so his whole life long man will be apprenticed

to Christ's humility, and until he has learned it, his soul will know no rest from intrusive thoughts, and he will be unable to pray with a clear mind.

He who would pray freely and untroubled must keep himself in ignorance of the news in newspapers; nor should he read shoddy books or be curious to know details of other people's lives. All this fills the mind with thoughts that stain, and when one would sort them out, they further and further entangle and weary the soul.

When the soul learns love of the Lord she is filled with compassion for the whole universe, for all God's creatures, and she prays that all men may repent and accept the grace of the Holy Spirit. But if the soul loses grace, love departs from her, for without the grace of God it is impossible to love our enemies, and then 'out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,' as saith the Lord.^{i.}

Be assured of this – if evil thoughts torment you, it means that you are not humble. The Lord said, 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'^{ii.}

Without Christ-like humility the soul will never be at rest in God – she will always be agitated by divers thoughts and impulses which will not let her contemplate God.

Blessed is he who has humbled himself, for he has found perfect rest in God. To this present time I ask the Lord for humility every day, for my soul has learned of the Holy Spirit the nature of Christ's humility, wherefore I thirst to acquire it.

O humility of Christ! He who has tasted thereof stretches out in longing towards God day and night, insatiable.

O how weak I am! I write a little and am already weary,

^{i.} Matt. xv:19; Mark vii:21.

^{ii.} Matt. xi:29.

and my body seeks rest. The Lord, too, when He was on earth in the flesh knew human weakness; and He, the Merciful One, grew weary on His way and slept in the boat during the storm; and when the disciples roused Him, He ordered the sea and the wind to be still, and there was a great calm.

So, too, with us: great peace reigns in our souls when we call upon the holy name of the Lord.

O Lord, grant us to praise Thee until our last breath!

Man falls under the spell of delusions either because he is unpractised or through pride. If it is because of inexperience, the Lord is swift to heal, but if pride is the cause, the soul must suffer long until she learns humility, and then the Lord will restore her to health.

We fall and are beguiled when we think ourselves more intelligent and more practised than others, even our spiritual father. In my inexperience I thought this once, and suffered for it; and I give heartfelt thanks to God that through this He humbled me and gave me understanding, and did not remove His mercy from me. And now I think that it is impossible to escape beguilement unless we make confession to our spiritual father, for to a confessor the Lord has given power to loose and to bind.

If you see a light within yourself, or outside, put no trust in it unless at the same time as you see the light, your heart within you is melted to tenderness for God and love for your neighbour; but have no fear either. Humble yourself, and the light will disappear.

If you see some vision or image, or dream a dream, put not your trust in it, for if it be from God the Lord will enlighten you. The soul that does not know the savour of the Holy Spirit is unable to apprehend the origin of a vision. The enemy offers the soul sweetness intermixed with vain self-satisfaction, and thereby is the presence of beguilement made known.

The Fathers of the Church say that the soul feels troubled and perplexed at visions proceeding from the enemy. But this applies only to the humble soul, who does not count herself worthy of visions, and feels either bewilderment or fear at the workings of the enemy; whereas the conceited man can experience neither fear nor even bewilderment, because he wants to have visions, and deems himself worthy of them, and so it is easy for the enemy to delude him.

That which is of heaven is made known through the Holy Spirit, whereas earthly things are discovered by the mind – but the man who would discover God with his mind, through science and learning, is in a state of beguilement, for God is to be known only through the Holy Spirit.

If in your mind you should think to see devils, humble yourself and try not to see them. Hasten to your confessor or the *staretz* to whom you have committed yourself. Tell him everything, and then the Lord will have mercy on you and you will escape delusion. But if you start thinking that you know more about the spiritual life than your spiritual father, and cease telling him in confession what befalls you, you will surely be beguiled for your pride.

Fight the enemy with the weapon of humility.

When you find another mind in conflict with your mind, humble yourself and the struggle will cease.

If it befalls you to see devils, be not afraid but humble yourself and the devils will disappear; but if you are overcome with fear, you will not escape unharmed. Be valiant. Remember that the Lord is watching you, to see whether your hope is in Him.

If you have fallen into delusion and would be delivered, do not despair, for the Lord loves all men and will let you recover, and you will have rest from thoughts brought by the enemy. But to find rest from devils, you must humble yourself and say, 'I am the worst of men, worse than any dumb animal or wild beast,' and make clean confession to a priest, and the devils will then be driven away.

Just as people go in and out of a house, so may thoughts proceeding from devils come and go again if you do not accept them.

If an inner voice tells you to steal, and you heed it, by heeding it you give the devil power over you. If a voice whispers to you to eat a lot – to eat your fill – and you do eat and eat, again a devil will have assumed power over you. In the same way, if you let suggestions from any passion get the better of you, you will become the dwelling-place of devils. But if you give yourself over to due repentance, the evil spirits will tremble and be constrained to depart from you.

When we weep for our sins and humble our soul, we do not see visions, and the soul has no desire for them; whereas when we give up weeping, and forsake humility, we may be attracted to seeing visions.

For a long time I did not understand why we must continue with contrite hearts once the Lord has forgiven us our sins. But afterwards I understood that where contrition is missing, one cannot hold out in humility; for evil spirits are proud and would instil pride in us, whereas the Lord teaches meekness, humility and love, and through these the soul finds rest.

We have to be brave in the war we wage. The Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah, ‘Go preach and be brave, or I punish thee.’ (‘Speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.’)ⁱⁱⁱ

The Lord loves the soul that is valiant and sage, and if we have neither courage nor good sense, we must ask God for them, and listen to our spiritual fathers – in them lives the grace of the Holy Spirit. In particular, the man whose mind has suffered harm from the working of the devil should in no wise trust himself but always listen to his confessor.

Spiritual misfortune befalls us through pride, whereas

ⁱⁱⁱ. Jeremiah i:17.

bodily adversity is often sent us from God out of love for us, as was the case with Job in his many sufferings.

It is very difficult to recognise pride in oneself. But here are some signs to tell you: if the enemy (devils) assail you, or wrong thoughts torment you, it means that humility is lacking in you, and so even if you do not realise the presence of pride in you – humble yourself.

If you are irritable or, as they say, 'nervy', that is a real calamity. Paroxysms or fits of mental anguish are diseases to be physicked with lowliness of spirit and repentance, and by loving one's brother and one's enemies.

XVIII

Adam's Lament

Adam, father of all mankind, in paradise knew the sweetness of the love of God; and so when for his sin he was driven forth from the garden of Eden, and was widowed of the love of God, he suffered grievously and lamented with a mighty moan. And the whole desert rang with his lamentations. His soul was racked as he thought: 'I have grieved my beloved Lord.' He sorrowed less after paradise and the beauty thereof – he sorrowed that he was bereft of the love of God, which insatiably, at every instant, draws the soul to Him.

In the same way the soul which has known God through the Holy Spirit but has afterwards lost grace experiences the torment that Adam suffered. There is an aching and a deep regret in the soul that has grieved the beloved Lord.

Adam pined on earth, and wept bitterly, and the earth was not pleasing to him. He was heartsick for God, and this was his cry:

'My soul wearies for the Lord, and I seek Him in tears.

'How should I not seek Him?

'When I was with Him my soul was glad and at rest,
and the enemy could not come nigh me.

'But now the spirit of evil has gained power over me,
harassing and oppressing my soul,

'so that I weary for the Lord even unto death,

'and my spirit strains to God,

and there is nought on earth can make me glad,

'Nor can my soul take comfort in any thing,

but longs once more to see the Lord,
that her hunger may be appeased.

‘I cannot forget Him for a single moment,
and my soul languishes after Him,
‘and from the multitude of my afflictions
I lift up my voice and cry:
‘ “Have mercy upon me, O God. Have mercy on Thy
fallen creature.” ’

Thus did Adam lament,
and the tears streamed down his face on to his beard,
on to the ground beneath his feet,
and the whole desert heard the sound of his moaning.
The beasts and the birds were hushed in grief;
while Adam wept because peace and love were lost to all
men on account of his sin.

Adam knew great grief when he was banished from paradise,
but when he saw his son Abel slain by Cain his brother,
Adam’s grief was even heavier.
His soul was heavy, and he lamented and thought:
‘Peoples and nations will descend from me, and multiply,
and suffering will be their lot, and they will live in enmity
and seek to slay one another.’
And his sorrow stretched wide as the sea,
and only the soul that has come to know the Lord and
the magnitude of His love for us can understand.

I, too, have lost grace and call with Adam:
‘Be merciful unto me, O Lord! Bestow on me the spirit
of humility and love.’

O love of the Lord! He who has known Thee seeks Thee,
tireless, day and night, crying with a loud voice:
‘I pine for Thee, O Lord, and seek Thee in tears.
‘How should I not seek Thee?

‘Thou didst give me to know Thee by the Holy Spirit,
‘And in her knowing of God my soul is drawn to seek
Thee in tears.’

Adam wept:

‘The desert cannot pleasure me;
nor the high mountains, nor meadow nor forest,
nor the singing of birds.
‘I have no pleasure in any thing.
‘My soul sorrows with a great sorrow:
‘I have grieved God.
‘And were the Lord to set me down in paradise again,
there, too, would I sorrow and weep –
“O why did I grieve my beloved God?” ’

The soul of Adam fell sick when he was exiled from
paradise,
and many were the tears he shed in his distress.
Likewise every soul that has known the Lord yearns for
Him, and cries:

‘Where art Thou, O Lord? Where art Thou, my Light?
‘Why hast Thou hidden Thy face from me?
‘Long is it since my soul beheld Thee,
and she wearies after Thee and seeks Thee in tears.
‘Where is my Lord?
‘Why is it that my soul sees Him not?
‘What hinders Him from dwelling in me?’

This hinders Him: Christ-like humility and love for my
enemies are not in me.

God is love insatiable, love impossible to describe.

Adam walked the earth, weeping from his heart’s manifold
ills, while the thoughts of his mind were on God;
And when his body grew faint, and he could no longer
shed tears, still his spirit burned with longing for God,
For he could not forget paradise and the beauty thereof.

But even more was it the power of love which caused the soul of Adam to reach out towards God.

I write of thee, O Adam;
But thou art witness, my feeble understanding cannot
fathom thy longing after God,
nor how thou didst carry the burden of repentance.
O Adam, thou dost see how I, thy child, suffer here on
earth.

Small is the fire within me,
and the flame of my love flickers low.
O Adam, sing unto us the song of the Lord,
that my soul may rejoice in the Lord
and be moved to praise and glorify Him
as the Cherubim and Seraphim praise Him in the heavens,
and all the hosts of heavenly angels sing to Him the thrice-
holy hymn.

O Adam our father, sing unto us the Lord's song,
that the whole earth may hear,
and all thy sons may lift their minds to God
and delight in the strains of the heavenly anthem,
and forget their sorrows on earth.

The Holy Spirit is love and sweetness for soul, mind and body. And those who have come to know God by the Holy Spirit stretch upward day and night, insatiable, to the living God, for the love of God is exceeding sweet. But when the soul loses grace, her tears flow as she seeks the Holy Spirit anew.

But the man who has not known God through the Holy Spirit cannot seek Him with tears, and his soul is ever harrowed by the passions; his mind is on earthly things. Contemplation is not for him, and he cannot come to know Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is made known through the Holy Spirit.

Adam knew God in paradise, and after his fall sought Him in tears.

O Adam, our father, tell us, thy sons, of the Lord.
Thy soul didst know God on earth,
Knew paradise, too, and the sweetness and gladness
thereof,
And now thou livest in heaven
and dost behold the glory of the Lord.
Tell of how our Lord is glorified for His sufferings.
Speak to us of the songs that are sung in heaven,
how sweet they are, for they are sung in the Holy Spirit.
Tell us of the glory of the Lord,
of His great mercy and how He loveth His creature.
Tell us of the Most Holy Mother of God,
how she is magnified in the heavens,
And the hymns that call her blessed.
Tell us how the Saints rejoice there, radiant with grace.
Tell us how they love the Lord,
and in what humility they stand before God.

O Adam, comfort and cheer our troubled souls.
Speak to us of the things thou dost behold in Heaven . . .

Why art thou silent? . . . Lo, the whole earth is in
travail . . .
Art thou so filled with the love of God that thou canst
not think of us?
Or thou beholdest the Mother of God in glory,
and canst not tear thyself from the sight,
and wouldst not bestow a tender word on us who sorrow,
that we might forget the affliction there is on earth?
O Adam, our father, thou dost see the wretchedness
of thy sons on earth. Why then art thou silent?

And Adam speaks:

‘My children, leave me in peace.
‘I cannot wrench myself from the love of God to speak
with you.
‘My soul is wounded with love of the Lord,
and rejoices in His beauty.

‘How should I remember the earth?
‘Those who live before the Face of the Most High
cannot think on earthly things.’

O Adam, our father, thou hast forsaken us, thine orphans,
though misery is our portion here on earth.
Tell us what we may do to be pleasing to God?
Look upon thy children scattered over the face of the
earth,
our minds scattered, too.
Many have forgotten God.
They live in darkness and journey to the abyss of hell.

‘Trouble me not. I see the Mother of God¹ in glory –
‘How can I tear myself away to speak with you?
‘I see the holy Prophets and Apostles; and all they are
in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God.
‘I walk in the gardens of paradise,
and everywhere behold the glory of the Lord.
‘For the Lord is in me and hath made me like unto Him-
self.’

O Adam yet we are thy children!
Tell us in our tribulation how we may inherit paradise,
that we, like thee, may behold the glory of the Lord.
Our souls long for the Lord, while thou dost live in heaven
and rejoice in the glory of the Lord.

‘Why cry ye out to me, my children?
‘The Lord loveth you and hath given you commandments.
‘Be faithful to them, love one another,
and ye shall find rest in God.
‘Let not an hour pass without ye repent of your trans-
gressions,
that ye may be ready to meet the Lord.
‘The Lord said: “I love them that love me,
and glorify them that glorify me.” ’

O Adam, pray for us, thy children.

Our souls are sad from many sorrows.

O Adam, our father, thou dwellest in heaven,
and dost behold the Lord seated in glory
on the right hand of God the Father.

Thou dost see the Cherubim and Seraphim and all the
Saints,
and dost hear celestial songs,
whose sweetness maketh thy soul forgetful of the earth.
But we here on earth are sad, and we weary greatly after
God.

There is little fire within us
with which ardently to love the Lord.
Inspire us, what must we do to gain paradise?

Adam makes answer:

‘Leave me in peace, my children,
for from sweetness of the love of God,
I cannot think about the earth.’

O Adam, our souls are weary,
and we are heavy-laden with sorrow.
Speak a word of comfort to us.
Sing to us from the songs thou hearest in heaven,
that the whole earth may hear and men forget their
afflictions . . .

O Adam, we are very sad.

‘Leave me in peace. The time of tribulation is past.
‘From the beauty of paradise and the sweetness of the
Holy Spirit
I can no longer be mindful of the earth.
‘But this I tell you:
‘The Lord loveth you, and do you live in love
and be obedient to those in authority over you.
‘Humble your hearts, and the Spirit of God will live in
you.
‘He cometh softly into the soul and giveth her peace,

and beareth wordless witness to salvation.
'Sing to God in love and lowliness of spirit,
for the Lord rejoiceth therein.'

O Adam, our father, what are we to do?
We sing, but love and humility are not in us.

'Repent before the Lord, and entreat of Him.
'He loveth man and will give all things.
'I, too, repented deeply and sorrowed much that I had
grieved God,
'And that peace and love were lost on earth because of
my sin.
'My tears ran down my face. My breast was wet with
my tears,
and the earth under my feet;
and the desert heard the sound of my moaning.
'You cannot apprehend my sorrow,
nor how I lamented after God and paradise.
'In paradise was I joyful and glad:
the Spirit of God rejoiced me,
and suffering was a stranger to me.
'But when I was driven forth from paradise
cold and hunger began to torment me.
'The beasts and the birds that were gentle and had loved
me turned into wild things,
and were afraid and ran from me.
'Evil thoughts goaded me.
'The sun and wind scorched me.
'The rain fell on me.
'I was plagued by sickness and all the afflictions of the
earth.
'But I endured all things, trusting steadfastly in God.

'Do ye, then, bear the travail of repentance.
'Greet tribulation. Wear down your bodies. Humble
yourselves
and love your enemies,

that the Holy Spirit may take up His abode in you,
and then shall ye know and attain the Kingdom of Heaven.

‘But come not nigh me:

‘Now from love of God have I forgotten the earth
and all that therein is.

‘Forgotten even is the paradise I lost,
for I behold the glory of the Lord,
and the glory of the Saints whom the light of God’s
Countenance
maketh radiant as the Lord Himself.’

O Adam, sing unto us a heavenly song,
that the whole earth may hearken,
and delight in the peace of love toward God.
We would hear those songs.
Sweet are they for they are sung in the Holy Spirit.

Adam lost the earthly paradise and sought it weeping. But
the Lord through His love on the cross gave Adam another
paradise, fairer than the old – a paradise in heaven where
shines the Light of the Holy Trinity.

What shall we render unto the Lord for His love to us?

XIX

Reminiscences and Conversations

In my childhood I used to like thinking of how the Lord ascended into heaven on the clouds, and how the Mother of God and the holy Apostles witnessed His Ascension. But when I lost God's grace (as a young man), my soul fell into wild ways and became captive to sin, and then I seldom thought about the Lord's Ascension. Later, however, I came to perceive my sins and sorrowed exceedingly for having grieved the Lord. I had lost my path to God and His Mother, sin was odious to me and I decided to enter a monastery, and I set my soul to implore God and obtain of the Merciful Lord forgiveness for my sins.

I entered the monastery at the end of my military service, and shortly afterwards I was tempted to return to the world and marry; but I told my soul firmly, 'I am going to stay and die here for my sins'. And I began to pray fervently to the Lord to forgive me the multitude of my transgressions.

At one time the spirit of despair laid hold of me – it seemed to me that God had finally rejected me, and there was no salvation for me, that, on the contrary, my soul bore evidence of everlasting damnation. And I felt in my soul that God was merciless and deaf to entreaty. This lasted an hour or a little over. A humour of this kind is so oppressive, so harrowing, that even to recall it terrifies. The soul cannot bear it for long. In moments such as these man may well be lost for all eternity. Such was the battle which the Merciful Lord allowed the spirit of evil to wage with my soul.

A short time elapsed. I went into church, to Vespers, and looking at the ikon of the Saviour, I cried:

‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, a sinner.’

And as I uttered these words I saw the living Lord in the place where the ikon was, and the grace of the Holy Spirit flooded my soul and my whole body. And so it was I came to know through the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ is God; and I was filled with a sweet longing to endure suffering for His sake.

Since that day when I came to know the Lord, my soul is drawn to Him, and the earth holds no delight for me. God is my only gladness. He is my joy and my strength, my wisdom and my treasure.

O God, enlighten us by Thy Holy Spirit,
that we may all apprehend Thy love.

In the good thief and the prodigal son the Lord shewed us how lovingly He comes to meet the repenting sinner. We read how ‘when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him;’ and he in no wise rebuked him but ordered the fatted calf to be killed and that all should be merry.ⁱ Such is God’s mercy and love. But to the sinful man the Lord seems pitiless, because there is no grace in his soul.

One of the novices on Mt. Athos, in the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon, accustomed himself to pray God without cease that his sins be forgiven him. And he began to deliberate in this way about the Kingdom of Heaven: ‘I, maybe, shall be saved,’ he thought, ‘if I entreat God with fervour to forgive me my sins. But if I do not see my father and mother in paradise I shall mourn, because I love them. What sort of paradise would it be for me if I am mourning for my own father and mother who may be in hell? In the same way as feast-days on earth are not so joyous if parents or kinsfolk

ⁱ cf. Luke xv: 20–23.

are absent, so shall I grieve even in heaven if I do not find my folk whom I love.'

He went on thinking like this for some six months. And then one day during Vespers he lifted up his eyes to the ikon of the Saviour and said a little prayer – hardly more than half a dozen words, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner' – and he saw the ikon turn into the living Saviour, and his soul and body were filled with ineffable sweetness. Through the Holy Spirit his soul knew our Lord Jesus Christ, knew that the Lord is merciful, that the love of God causes a man to forget all else; and from that time forth his soul was afire with love for the Lord.

Glory be to Thy compassion, O Lord!
Thou dost give the soul to know
Thy love for Thy creation,
and the soul knows her Master and Creator.

The Lord gave the soul of man a sufficiency of knowledge of Himself, and the soul came to love her Creator, and was exceeding glad. 'Merciful is our Lord.' And her thought goes no further.

The soul is content in the Master. He gives her rest, and the earth is forgotten in God – he who abides in God is not mindful of the earth. The soul is enamoured of the One Lord only, and in nought finds rest save in her Creator, but ever and anon sheds scalding tears – 'Wherefore have I grieved so Merciful a God?'

The Lord called the sinful soul to repentance, and she turned to the Lord, and He met her with mercy, and revealed Himself to her.

And the soul of man knew God – God merciful, loving-kind, most fair – and loved Him utterly, and from the abundance of love's ardour she reaches out toward Him, insatiable, and cannot forget Him, for the ardour of this love

toward God will not let the soul forget Him neither by day nor by night, not for a single instant.

And should the waters of grace recede in the soul – to what shall I liken her grief? O how she entreats God to return the grace whereof she had tasted!

To me it is a wondrous thing that the Lord did not overlook me, His fallen creature. There are some who despair, thinking that the Lord will not forgive them their sins. Such thoughts are from the enemy. The Lord is so exceeding merciful that it passes our understanding. The man whose soul is filled with the love of God in the Holy Spirit knows how the Lord loveth mankind. But when the soul loses this love, she grieves and laments, and the mind has no wish to dwell on any other thing, but only seeks God.

A certain deacon once told me that Satan had appeared to him and said, 'I like proud men, and they belong to me. Thou art proud, and I shall take thee to myself.' But he answered Satan and said: 'I am the worst of men;' and Satan straightway vanished.

I, too, had a like experience when devils appeared to me. I was somewhat afeared but I said: 'Lord, Thou seest that devils prevent me from praying. Tell me what I must do that the devils go from me.'

And the Lord said in my soul:

'Souls that are puffed up always suffer from devils.'

And I said:

'Lord, shew me what I must think on that my soul may be humbled.'

And in my soul came the answer:

'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.'

Thenceforth I began to do this, and my soul found rest in God.

My soul doth learn humility of the Lord. The Lord revealed Himself to me in a manner which passes understanding, and

delighted my soul with love; but afterwards He hid Himself, and now my soul stretcheth out with longing toward Him day and night. He, the Good and Merciful Shepherd, sought me out, His sheep already wounded by the wolves, and He drove them off.

My soul knows the mercy of the Lord towards sinful man, and very truth do I write before the face of God when I tell you that all we sinners shall be saved, and not a single soul perish provided we repent, for the nature of the Lord is goodness that no words can describe.

Turn with your soul to God and say, 'Lord, forgive me,' and do not imagine that the Lord will not forgive. In His mercy He cannot fail to forgive: He forgives forthwith and makes holy. Thiswise does the Holy Spirit teach in our Church.

The Lord is love. 'O taste and see that the Lord is good,'ⁱⁱⁱ cries the Psalmist. My soul has tasted of this goodness of the Lord, and my spirit reaches insatiable day and night to God. I will write of the love of God, wherewith my soul knows no repletion, so captive is she to thoughts of God Almighty.

From the Holy Spirit flows love, and without love no one can have proper understanding of God. Through the Holy Spirit is the love of God for us made known – the love which the Lord pours out upon His servants that they may pray for the whole people. And I should not have known of this, had grace not taught me. But do not imagine that I am in a powerful state of grace. Think not either that I am beguiled. No. I only tasted grace in perfection – the life I lead is worse than that of the most unenlightened peasant. I am a monk invested with the *schema* but am unworthy of that calling. In me there is only the desire to be saved – of spiritual and ascetic feats I know nothing. But the Lord

ⁱⁱⁱ. Ps. xxxiv: 8.

vouchsafed me to savour the grace of the Holy Spirit that instructs the soul in the way of God which leads to the Kingdom of Heaven.

My heedless manner of living grieves me but I can do no better. I know that I have little schooling and am dull-witted and sinful, but there – the Lord loves even the likes of me, and so with all her might my soul would toil for Him.

O how great is the mercy of God! I am such a vile, despicable person, yet the Lord so dearly loves me. But He is love itself; and loves all men thus, and in His mercy calls us to Him: ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.’ⁱⁱⁱ This rest in the Holy Spirit, the humble soul receives in return for her repentance.

We are the last of the monks. But even today there are not a few ascetics who tirelessly fight the good fight. They are hidden of the Lord in that they do not perform visible miracles, but in their souls, day and night, wondrous prodigies are accomplished, only people have not eyes to see. Here is a marvel: when a soul yields to pride, she falls into darkness and despondency; whereas when she humbles herself, at once joy comes to her, and softness and light.

The man who does not strive, who does not make clean confession of his sins, is ignorant of this and insensible of grace. But the Lord in His mercy gave us repentance, and through repentance all men without exception can be saved.

The enemy comes to laud those who have grace, and when a soul is seduced by his praises she thereby loses the grace she had. And the soul is aware of grace retiring but at first does not understand that pride is the cause, and only after long struggle does she set herself on the path to humility.

When I lose grace my soul is exceeding sad and I exclaim,
‘Why did I transgress and so lose the Lord? O when will

ⁱⁱⁱ Matt. xi: 28.

my soul have her fill again of the love of God? When will she rejoice in the Lord again? When will my heart once more be gladdened within me and be filled with the wisdom of God, so that He may love me as He loved the prophet David for his meekness, or Moses that he was faithful in his house.^{iv}

The Lord loves us dearly and without end. This is evident both from the Holy Scriptures and from personal experience. My soul sins in thought day and night but I have only to say, 'Forgive me, O Lord, for I am very weak, and grant me Thy peace that Thou givest to Thy servants,' and forthwith my soul finds peace.

The Lord said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' And so I thought to myself, 'Part of my time I will live in silence, and part devote to peacemaking.' So I went and sat with Brother X., a monk of the strict order who was agitated in mind; and entering into conversation with him, I began to exhort him to forgive and live in peace with all men. For a while he bore with me but presently he rose up against me so fiercely that I fled his cell, almost running from him; and I wept much before God that peace had not been preserved. And I realised that one must seek the will of God and live as the Lord wishes, instead of thinking up spiritual feats for oneself. And often did I err thus. I would read something which seemed a good thing to do but in the event it would turn out otherwise.

It is difficult to live without a *staretz*. The inexperienced soul does not apprehend God's will, and endures many afflictions before she learns humility.

At the very beginning, when I was a young novice, I told my confessor that I had heeded a dissolute thought. His reply was, 'Always reject such thoughts.' Forty-five years have gone by since then, and not once have I accepted a dissolute

^{iv}. Heb. iii: 5.

thought, nor been angry with anyone, for my soul remembers the love of the Lord and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, and affronts I forget.

Some fifteen years ago Father Abbot (Archimandrite Missail) wanted to send Father S. out in the boat, but he refused. 'I am not going,' he said. The Abbot then asked him, 'What do you want to do?' 'I want to fell wood,' said Father S., and soon after he had gone off woodcutting, a tree crashed down on him, and he lay a long time in hospital and repented of his disobedience.

And once I, too, obtained an obedience of my own choosing. I had been working as a steward but I took a fancy to go and live in solitude at Old Russikon. Perpetual fasting was the practice there: the whole week, except on Saturdays and Sundays, they ate without oil, so that because of the fasting few people went there. The cellarer in those days was Father Serapion, who lived on bread and water only; and he was succeeded by Father Onisiphoros, who attracted many monks to him by his meekness and humility, and his eloquence. So gentle and lowly was he that he had no need of words – just to look at him would start you mending your ways, such a common-sensible and peaceful nature was his. I spent much time with him. Then there was Father Sabinos who for seven years had not lain down on his pallet; and Father Dositheos, a monk exemplary in all things. Father Anatoly possessed the gift of repentance. He said to me once, 'For many years I did not know how grace works, but now I know.' He had received grace during a meal in the refectory.

Father Israel was another monk who lived at Old Russikon. He beheld the Mother of God. He was very old and before, when he was living in Russia, he went to St. Seraphim of Sarov and saw him in the flesh. Father Israel lived in a little hut where the kitchen-gardener now lives. Grass grew there and we used to scythe it. Once I went to see him. He was sitting on a little bench under a green oak-tree.

He was a tall, gaunt man, and there he sat with his prayer-beads in his hands. I was a young monk and I approached respectfully and bowed to him, and said, 'Give me your blessing, Father.' And he replied gently, 'May God bless you, child of Christ.' 'Father,' I said to him, 'you live a solitary life here. It is good that you can give yourself up to spiritual prayer like this.' And he answered me, 'Prayer is always spiritual: it is we who lack the spirit.' I began to feel uncomfortable and dared not question him further but I did not understand the meaning of his words. Later, though, I perceived that 'we lack the spirit' because we do not know how to live as we should, working for God. We had two other monks in the Monastery besides Staretz Israel, who had been to see St. Seraphim – Father Sabinos and Father Seraphim, who both came from Tambov.

And so I wanted to go and join these monks who were devoting themselves to spiritual striving, and live with them, and I implored the Abbot until he gave me permission to leave my work as steward, and go. But it did not please God that I should live there, and within six months I was returned to my old task, because I knew something about building; but the Lord punished me for my self-will – I caught cold at Old Russikon and it affected my head, which aches constantly to this day.

So we must seek to know the will of God through our Abbot, and not ourselves insist on anything.

The love of God gives strength to continue in prayer the whole night through, but pain in my head wears me out and I am obliged to give up and rest. These headaches have been given me because I insisted on having my own way, and left my task as steward to go into the 'desert' to have greater freedom for prayer; but the Lord wanted me to spend my life in the Monastery as steward.

Twice they would have made me prior, and once senior steward, but each time I refused, and for that God punished me. It was only later that I understood that everyone is

needed in the place where he is, and we may all be saved whatever our office.

Returning to my cell after the *Synaxis*^v had appointed me steward in place of Father Severianos, I started to pray:

‘Lord, Thou dost entrust to me the care of our great Monastery – help me to manage this task.’

And in my soul came the answer, ‘Be mindful of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and seek after it.’

My soul mourns. Sickness prevents me from serving the Lord. The pain in my head wears me down, and the grace which surmounts sickness is not in me. When there is grace in great measure, the soul desires suffering. Thus the martyrs had abundant grace and their bodies rejoiced with their souls when they were tortured for the sake of their beloved Lord. Whoever has experienced this grace knows of this, but we must bear with our sickness.

Sickness and poverty humble man to the core. I went to see Father S. and asked him, ‘How do you feel?’, for he was ill. But instead of answering me, undone by his sickness he threw his round cap on the floor. ‘Thank God for your sickness,’ I said to him. ‘Otherwise it will go badly with you on your death-bed. Look, you are about to be vowed to the strictest order: grace will come and comfort you in your trouble.’

I went to congratulate him the day after he had been invested with the *schema* and asked, ‘How are you?’ And he replied joyfully,

‘As in Holy Baptism the Lord has given me freely of His grace.’

And after that he bore his illness lightly and died in peace, for the sweetness of the Holy Spirit surpasses all the delights of the world.

^v. Council of the Monastery Elders.

The Lord gives sinful man the grace of the Holy Spirit, wherefore our faith is strong. And how can we return thanks to the Lord for His love that we may perceive every day, every hour?

I asked a young monk whether he had lost the grace that comes with being invested with the *schema*. (He had been professed for about a fortnight.)

‘Though I am ill, yet I feel the grace of God in my soul,’ he said to me.

Another ten days or so went by and I put the same question to him, and, radiant, he replied:

‘Glory be to God, I sense the Lord’s mercy.’

When my soul lost humility I started growing irritable, yet did I remember and thirst for the humility of Christ; and I began to entreat God to forgive me and purge me of the spirit of pride, and give me peace. And when my soul took to detesting my sins, the Holy Spirit taught me to pray without ceasing, and to love. And knowing how dearly the Lord loves His people, the dead especially, I would shed tears for them every evening. I pitied men for having deprived themselves of such a Merciful Lord. And once I said to my spiritual father,

‘I pity people who suffer in hell, and I weep for them every night, and my soul knows such anguish that even devils become objects of pity.’

And my spiritual father told me that this prayer of mine came from the grace of God.

A certain monk versed in the spiritual life asked me whether I wept over my sins. ‘Not very much,’ I answered him, ‘but I do shed many tears for the dead.’ Then said he to me, ‘Weep rather for yourself – the Lord will have mercy on the others. That is what Abbot Makarios said.’ I obeyed and began following his counsel, and no longer wept for the dead but then my tears for my own sins also ceased to flow.

I spoke to another ascetic monk about this, a monk who

had the gift of tears. He liked to reflect on the sufferings of the Saviour, meditating how greatly the Lord, the King of glory, suffered for us; and each day he shed mighty tears. I asked him, 'Should I pray for the dead?' He sighed, and said, 'Were it possible I would pray everyone out of hell, and only then would my soul be easy and rejoice.'

As he spoke he made a gesture with his arms as if he were gathering up sheaves of corn in a field, and the tears streamed from his eyes.

After that I no longer gave up praying for the dead, and tears came back to me and I wept much as I prayed for them.

In my own life there has been both good and evil, and in the course of my sixty years I have come to recognise how great is the force of habit. Both soul and mind can acquire habits, and a man will act according to the habits he has formed. If he makes sin a habit, he will constantly be drawn towards sin, and in this, devils will further him; but if he acquires good habits, God will help him by His grace.

If, then, you make it your custom to pray continually, to love your neighbour and to weep in prayer for the whole world, you will find your soul drawn to prayer, to tears and love. And if you make a habit of giving alms, of being obedient and frank in confession to your spiritual father, you will continue thus always, and therein find rest in God.

The soul that enjoys criticising people, or being disobedient or unrestrained, or has abandoned repentance, cannot escape the snares of the devil, cannot free herself from bad thoughts; but if she will weep over her sins, and love her fellows, the Lord will give her tears for the whole world.

O Lord, give me tears
that my soul may weep
for the love of my brother day and night.

And lo, God hears her prayer, and grants her *mighty tears*.

Our Lord likes it when we shed tears of love in prayer for people, and mercifully hearkens to us.

Once I was walking across a field from the Ostizhorsky camp, where our battalion of Sappers was stationed in summer, to the village post office of Kolpino, in order to send some money to the Holy Mountain (Athos). On the way a mad dog came rushing straight at me. When it was quite close I just said, 'Lord, have mercy!' and at those words some force or other made the dog swerve to one side as if it had come up against something, and, skirting me, it made off in the direction of Kolpino, where it bit a lot of people and did much harm to both villagers and cattle.

This incident made me realise how close the Lord is to sinful man, and how swift to hearken to our prayers.

Once I needlessly killed a fly. The poor thing crawled on the ground, hurt and mangled, and for three whole days I wept over my cruelty to a living creature, and to this day the incident remains in my memory.

Somehow it happened that some bats bred on the balcony of the storeroom where I was, and I poured boiling water over them, and once again I shed many tears on this account, and since then I have never harmed any living creature.

One day, going from the Monastery to Old Russikon-on-the-Hill, I saw a dead snake on my path which had been chopped into pieces, and each piece writhed convulsively, and I was filled with pity for every living creature, every suffering thing in creation, and I wept bitterly before God.

The Spirit of God teaches the soul to love every living thing so that she would have no harm come to even a green leaf on a tree, or trample underfoot a flower of the field. Thus the Spirit of God teaches love towards all, and the soul feels compassion for every being, loves even her enemies and pities even devils because they have fallen away from the good.

This is why the Lord bade us to love our enemies, and the Spirit of God gives us the power to do so. And if we are weak and there is no love in us, let us fervently entreat the Lord and His Most Pure Mother, and all the Saints; and the Lord Who loves us so dearly will help us in all things: and when He lays His touch on our souls and bodies everything in us is transformed, and there is great joy in the soul that she knows her Creator and His compassion that passes all understanding.

There are people who attach themselves to animals, and stroke and fondle and talk to them; and have forsaken the love of God, and because of this that love between brothers for which Christ died in great suffering gets lost. It is silly to do this. Feed animals and cattle, and do not beat them – in this consists man's duty of kindness towards them; but to become attached, to love, caress and talk to them – that is folly for the soul.

The soul that has come to know the Lord ever stands before Him in love and awe – how then can she at the same time love, stroke and talk to cattle, cats or dogs? To do so means that we have forgotten Christ's commandment to love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds.

Wild animals, cattle and all dumb creatures are earthly, and we ought not to attach ourselves to the earth, but with all the strength of our minds love the Lord and His Most Pure Mother, who is our Defender, and the Saints, and hold ourselves in reverence before them. They pray for us and are sad when we neglect God's commandments.

On one occasion the idea came to me to buy some fresh fish. I had no money of my own but I had some belonging to the Monastery, and I could have bought fish but I did not want to violate my usual order of life. Nevertheless, I was carried away by the idea – to such an extent that there I was, even in church during the Liturgy, thinking of fish. Then I

realised that this came from the enemy, and by God's mercy suddenly knew that grace helps one not to eat much, whereas the devil urges us to feast and delight in food.

Three days was I tormented by this obsession before with difficulty wrenching myself free by prayer and tears – so hard is the struggle against even such trifling whispers that would beguile.

Here is something else that happened to me when I was living at the dependency of the Monastery. I eat my fill, and a couple of hours later find I could eat as much all over again. I went to weigh myself on the scales, and what do you think? – in three days I had put on well over half a stone. And I realised that this was a case of temptation, for we monks must treat our bodies so sparsely that there is no energy left in them for anything which may hamper prayer. A body that is replete hinders pure prayer, and the Spirit of God enters not into a full belly. But one must avoid excessive fasting, so as not to grow weak out of season and then be unable to fulfil one's task of obedience. I knew one obedientiary who wore himself away with fasting, and grew weak and died prematurely.

I remember once I was attending Vespers in the Pokrovsky Cathedral. A confessor, Father N., was reading the *Acatnist*.^{vi} Looking at him, I thought, 'What a fat monk! He could not prostrate himself in worship!' At that instant, just as I was about to bow low myself, an unseen something hit me a blow in the back. I wanted to call out, 'Hold me up!' but couldn't because the pain was so bad.

Thus did the Lord mercifully punish me and so teach me never to pass judgment on anyone.

Once after saying my prayers I sat down and started thinking: 'I do not want to die.' And I said, 'Lord, Thou dost

^{vi}. Hymn of praise in honour of Our Lord, the Mother of God and the Saints, during which the Congregation remains standing.

behold my heart and seest I have no wish to die.. When a man has not seen his kinsfolk for a long time he goes to meet them with joy; but though my soul knoweth Thee, O Merciful Lord, yet am I loath to die.' And there came in my soul the answer, 'That is because you have little love for Me.'

And indeed I love the Lord but little.

Father Lazarus, who had been a captain in the army, used to tell the story of how a certain peasant went to fetch wood for the furnace. Exhausted by his labours, he lay down to rest under a giant oak-tree, and looking up at the branches of the oak and seeing the masses of fat acorns growing on them, thought to himself, 'It would have been better had pumpkins grown on the oak-tree.' With this thought he shut his eyes, and suddenly an acorn fell and hit him hard on the lip. Whereupon the peasant said, 'I was wrong: God is cleverer than I am, and did well to make acorns and not pumpkins grow on oak-trees. If that had been a pumpkin, it could have killed me with its weight.'

We all of us criticise God's work like this, instead of trusting Him. The man who has committed himself to His holy will is at peace, whereas the one who strives to apprehend everything with his mind is unskilled in the spiritual life. One must submit to God's will in order to find out what God's will is, and the Lord by His grace will then give understanding, and life will be easy. And though such a man be ill, or impoverished, there will be joy in his soul, because both his soul and his understanding are sound, and with his mind he sees the Lord, and in lowliness of spirit loves Him, and from his love forgets the world; but should he think of the world, the love of God will constrain him to pray for the world, even unto tears.

So agreeable is the way of the Lord for our spirit.

Not long ago there was a fire in the St. Stephen's outside cell. The monk who lived there was outdoors when the fire

started, and, to rescue some of his things, he rushed in and was himself burnt to death. But had he prayed to the Lord and said, 'Lord, I want to save this and that: tell me whether I may,' the Lord would *without fail* have told him, and said, 'Go,' had that been possible, or 'Don't go,' if not. So close is the Lord to us and so greatly does He love us.

Many a time in the course of my life have I consulted the Lord in the hour of trouble, and always I have received an answer. This love we understand, not through our minds but by God's compassion from the grace of the Holy Spirit. Maybe somebody will say that this only happens with saints but I tell you, the Lord loves the most sinful men, too, and bestows His mercy, should the soul but turn away from sin; and the Lord takes her in His embrace and brings her to the Father, and then all heaven rejoices over her.

On the 14th September 1932 there was a violent earthquake on Mt. Athos. It took place at nine o'clock in the evening during Vespers on the eve of the Feast of the Elevation of the Cross. I was standing in the choir near the Father Prior's confessional, and Father Prior himself was standing outside the confessional beside me. Inside the confessional a brick fell from the ceiling and there was a shower of plaster. At first I felt a bit frightened but I quickly reassured myself and said to the Prior, 'See, the Merciful Lord would have us repent.' And we looked at the monks in the church and those in the choirs, and very few of them were alarmed – about half a dozen left the church but the rest remained where they were, and Vespers continued in the usual way, as quietly as if nothing had happened. And I thought to myself, 'What an abundance of the grace of the Holy Spirit abides in these monks that they can remain calm while a terrific earthquake shakes the whole of this huge monastery building, raining down stones and mortar, setting chandeliers and ikon-lamps swinging to and fro, making the bells in the belfry ring and even the biggest bell of all toll with the violence of the vibration!' And I thought, 'The soul that has come to know

the Lord fears nothing except sin, the sin of pride, in particular. She knows that the Lord loves us, and if he loves us, what have we to fear? The Merciful Lord is speaking to us for our understanding. "My children," He says, "repent and live in love. Be obedient and sober, and learn meekness and humility of Me, and you shall find rest for your souls." '

One day I was going to the Serbian Monastery of Chilandar. Father Nikolai, cellarer (guest-master) of our Thebaidian Hermitage, joined me. It was night and we walked through the green forest. The way was pleasant, our conversation, too. We were discussing love for one's neighbour, and Father Nikolai told me of a remarkable instance.

In the south of Russia, near Rostov, an *artel* consisting of a score of men was at work. One of the gang, whose name was Andrei, was a bad character, so that it was not easy to live with him. But another, the youngest of them all, was a very good person who loved God and kept the Lord's commandments. His name was Nikolai. Now, after Andrei had brought a great deal of evil and unpleasantness on his comrades they thought to murder him, but young Nikolai would not agree at all and tried to persuade them not to attack Andrei. The *artel* would not listen to him, and killed Andrei. News of the murder spread round, finally reaching the ears of the police. Then Nikolai, seeing his comrades' misfortune, said to them, 'All of you have wives and children, whereas I am a single man on my own. So say that I did the murder, and I will say the same. Penal servitude will not be hard for me but if you are sentenced, think how many people will suffer.' At first the others made no reply. They were ashamed before Nikolai who had tried to prevail on them not to kill, but in the end Nikolai persuaded them and they all agreed to say that Nikolai was the murderer.

The authorities – the public prosecutor, the investigators, the gendarmes – arrived on the spot, and the inquiry began into who had done the murder. 'I did,' declared Nikolai. The others were interrogated and they, too, said it was

Nikolai. Nikolai had a gentle face and a humble disposition, and he spoke softly and quietly. The investigators questioned him at length – they could not believe that such a gentle, quiet man could be a murderer; but the matter went to court in the usual way, and again everyone wondered that such a humble, kind man should have committed murder, and none of the judges was willing to believe it, although Nikolai insisted he was guilty. For a long time the court could not bring itself to pronounce sentence. Not a hand was lifted to sign the verdict. And again they questioned him, and the others, too, in order to get to the bottom of the mystery, adjuring him to tell the truth. At last he said that if they would not seek the real culprit, he would tell them the real story. The trial had brought out the fact that Andrei had been a bad man, and the public prosecutor and the judges agreed to stop the case if they knew the truth. And then not Nikolai but the others related what had really happened, and how Nikolai had arranged to take the guilt on himself so as to save them from punishment. The judges stopped the case, saying that Nikolai had not been proved guilty, and one of them even declared, ‘Andrei was a wicked man and got what he deserved, whereas these are good people, let them live in peace.’

This story shows what a strong force is love for one’s neighbour. The grace of God was in the heart of that young Nikolai, and was reflected in his face, and reacted on all the others.

Father John of Kronstadt

I once saw Father John of Kronstadt. He was celebrating the Liturgy. I marvelled at the force of his prayer, and to this day am amazed. Almost forty years have passed since then, and I have never seen anyone celebrate as he did. The people loved him and all stood there in the fear of the Lord. And that is not surprising – the Holy Spirit draws the hearts of men towards Himself. We see from the Gospels how

multitudes of people followed after the Lord. The word of the Lord drew the people, for it is spoken through the Holy Spirit and is therefore sweet and pleasing for the soul.

When Luke and Cleopas were on their way to Emmaus and the Lord drew near and talked with them, their hearts burned with love for God. Father John, too, had abundantly of the Holy Spirit within him, firing his soul with love of God; and the same Spirit worked on men through him. I saw how people ran to him, as to a warm fire, in order to obtain his blessing. And having received it they rejoiced, for the Holy Spirit is pleasant and gives peace and delight to the soul.

There are some who do not think well of Father John, and in this they grieve the Holy Spirit, Who lived in him, and still lives after his death. They say that he was rich and well-clad. But they do not know that riches do no harm to the man in whom dwells the Holy Spirit, because his soul is entirely wrapped in God, and transformed because of God, and has forgotten riches and fine array. Happy are those who love Father John, for he will pray for us. His love for God is a burning love; his whole being a flame of love.

O noble Father John who intercedest for us,
I give thanks to God that I saw thee.
I give thanks to thee, too, good and holy shepherd,
that because of thy prayers
I left the world and came to Holy Mount Athos,
where I have witnessed great mercy at God's hands.

And now I write, rejoicing that the Lord has given me understanding of the life and heroic strivings of a good pastor.

A great spiritual feat of restraint is it to live with a young wife and yet not approach her – a feat only possible for those who are sensible of the Holy Spirit within them. The Holy Spirit is sweet, and triumphs over the dear love of a woman. Many saints feared the proximity of women, but even living

in the midst of women Father John possessed the Holy Spirit,
Whose sweetness surpasses carnal love.

I will say further – he was so extremely humble that he did not lose the grace of the Holy Spirit, and so he loved the people, and led the minds of men to God.

You see the strength of the Holy Spirit in him? Reading his book, *My Life in Christ*, one's soul feels the power of the grace of God in his words. 'But,' you may object, 'I read it and didn't get a thing out of it.' 'Is it not,' I ask you, 'because you are proud? Grace stays aloof from the proud in heart.'

O Father John, now thou dost dwell in heaven
and behold the Lord, Whom thy soul loved
when thou wast still on earth.

We beg thee, pray for us,
that we, too, may love the Lord,
and offer up repentance in which the Lord rejoiceth.

O good and holy Father, thou hast risen
like a soaring eagle over the mighty land of Russia,
and from the heights to which the Holy Spirit, living in
thee,
hath lifted thee, thou seest the needs of the people.
By the strength of the Holy Spirit
thou didst draw the people to God,
and they, as they listened to the word of God
proceeding from thy lips, wept and ardently repented.

O great and good Father, though thy body be dead,
in the spirit thou art with us,
and standing before God in the Holy Spirit
thou dost behold us from the heavens.
And we humbly venerate thee.

Father Stratonikos

Father Stratonikos, the Caucasian anchorite, twice visited the Holy Mountain. His family came from the province of Kharkov. In the world he had been a tradesman with his own shop. He had children, too. And his soul began to burn with a mighty fire of repentance, and leaving his family and all he possessed, he withdrew to the Caucasus.

He was a wonderful man. The sight of him made one's soul tremble. His eyes were constantly filled with tears; and when he spoke of God, he spoke with such feeling and in so humble a manner that all who heard him were rejoiced and comforted. His message was powerful, steeped in the fear of God and in love. He was verily an eagle among the fathers. Contact with him transformed one, and the holiness of his life was humbling. His word refashioned souls and restored many who had fallen. Listening to him, men forgot earthly things – their souls were lifted with longing towards God.

He was slightly above average height, with a pleasant face and dark hair. Everyone liked him. He was held in esteem – and deservedly so – by those who were spending their lives in spiritual endeavour in the Caucasus. The life he led was a stern one. He bore heat and cold, in winter going barefoot for the love of God. Never a murmur escaped his lips, for his soul was given over to the Divine will, and he endured every suffering with joy. He preached fiery repentance and led many from the slough of despond to a life of eager endeavour. The grace of God was clearly present in his words – regenerating the minds of men and detaching them from earthly things.

The Caucasian ascetics once brought to him a man possessed of a devil, and when Father Stratonikos saw him, he wept from fulness of love, and cried: 'O poor creature of God to be so tormented of devils!' and he made the sign of the cross over him with the words, 'May the Lord Jesus

Christ heal thee,' and the sick man was instantly made whole. Such was the power of his faith and prayer.

O, our dear Father Stratonicos,
prodigious lover of weeping, where art thou now?
Come to us, and we will build thee a cell
on the high mountain,
and contemplate thy holy way of life,
and according to the measure of our strength
imitate thy mighty strivings!
The time of thy tears, O Father, is over.
Now thou dost listen in heaven to the songs of the
Cherubim.
Now behold the glory of the Lord,
Whom thy soul so loved on earth, where aspiring to
Him
she gave herself over to tears of repentance.

The Lord loveth man and bestowed on him this gift of weeping, that the soul might be washed in the water of tears, and contemplate the Lord in purity, in a spirit of love and reverent awe.

Father Stratonicos also said that the time would come when monks would work out their salvation in the clothes of a layman.

With might and main, and to our last breath, we must strive to preserve our initial fervour, which many have lost and not recovered. To retain this fervour, we must live with the idea of death always in mind, for if the soul is even partially prepared for death, she is not afraid, humility and repentance come, and all earthly things are forgotten. The mind continues undistracted, and prayer is diligent.

The man who is mindful of death is not beguiled by the world; he loves his fellows and even his enemies; he is obedient and sober; and so peace is preserved in his soul, and the grace of the Holy Spirit approaches. And when through the

Holy Spirit you come to know God, your soul will delight in the Lord, and you will love Him and will ever remember the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, and this verily is heavenly food.

I talked much concerning these things with the great ascetic Father Stratonikos. He told me that in the Caucasus he had met seven men who had tasted of the grace of the Holy Spirit but some of them knew not the way of the Lord – they did not know how the Lord nurtures the soul – and so later they fell back. The Scriptures speak about this, and the holy fathers too, but a man must live through much in order to know it all by experience.

At first when a man begins to work for the Lord, grace gives him the strength to be zealous for good, all is easy and effortless; and seeing this, in his inexperience he thinks to himself, ‘I shall continue thus zealously all my life long.’ And at the same time he exalts himself above those who live carelessly, and begins to pass judgment on them; and so he loses the grace that was helping him to keep God’s commandments. And he does not understand how this has happened – everything was going so well with him but now it is all so difficult and he feels no desire to pray. But he should not be afraid: it is the Lord in His mercy nurturing the soul. The moment the soul exalts herself above her fellows, she is attacked by some thought or impulse displeasing to God. If she humbles herself grace will not depart, but if she does not, some small temptation follows to make her do so. Should she again not humble herself, a ravaging struggle with lustful passions will start up within her. If she still does not humble herself she will fall into a measure of sin. Should she once again fail to humble herself a great temptation will ensue and there will be grave sin. And so it will go on until the soul does humble herself, when temptation will leave her, and if she brings herself very low a gentle peace will come and all that is evil disappear.

Thus the *whole spiritual warfare wages around humility*. The enemy fell through pride, and would draw us to perdition

by the same means. The enemy praises us, and should the soul listen to his praise, grace withdraws until she repents. Thus throughout her life the soul is occupied with the lesson of Christ-like humility, and so long as she lacks humility wrong thoughts and impulses will always torment her. But the humble soul finds the rest and the peace which is spoken of by the Lord.^{vii.}

Fasting and abstinence, vigil and withdrawal into silence, and other exploits of spiritual discipline all help, but humility is the principal power. Mary of Egypt subdued her body within a year – there in the desert there was nothing for her to eat – but for seventeen years she had to wrestle against intrusive thoughts.

Humility is not learned in a trice. That is why the Lord said, ‘Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.’^{viii.} Learning takes time. And there are some who have grown old in the practice of spiritual endeavour yet still have not learned humility, and they cannot understand why things are not well with them, why they do not feel peace and their souls are cast down.

Today Father T. (an anchorite) came to see me. Knowing that this *staretz* was a man of constant spiritual striving, I thought that he would be wanting to speak of God. We talked for a long time and then I asked him to say a word to me which would make me correct my faults. He was silent for a while, and then he said,

‘Pride is manifest in you . . . Why do you speak so much of God? The love of God, the Saints hid away in their souls – their discourse was about weeping.’

Father T., you humbled my soul who loves her Creator.

My soul loves the Lord, and how shall I hide this fire which warms my soul?

^{vii.} John xiv: 27.

^{viii.} Matt. xi: 29.

How shall I hide the mercies of the Lord in which my soul delights?

How shall I forget the Lord's compassion which gave my soul to know God?

How can I hold my peace about God, with my soul captive to Him?

How shall I be silent concerning God when my spirit is consumed day and night with love for Him? And am I an adversary of tears?

Do you understand, Father, what you said to my soul? Did you ask why I speak much of God?

My soul loves Him – how could I hide the Lord's love for me?

I deserve eternal torment but He forgave me and gave me His grace which cannot be hidden away in my soul.

Can it be you do not know that I am fond of you, and began to speak of God because I thought that your soul, too, loves God and is warmed by the love of God?

But what shall I tell my soul? Hide within thyself what the Lord said? But all heaven knows about this. And I should be asked, 'Wherefore did you conceal the Lord's mercies, and not declare them to men, that all might love God and find rest in Him?'

Lo, the Master in His mercy calls all of us, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and I will give you rest.'^{ix}

My soul knows this rest in God, wherefore, loving God and my brother, I speak of God's compassion.

I thought that your soul rejoiced in God as does mine, but you dismayed my soul when you asked 'Why do you speak so much of God?'

But look you, I speak truth when I say that the Lord is merciful and forgives men their sins.

So then, I will close my lips in silence, and with my soul sing a song to God that our Lord may rejoice, for He loves

^{ix} Matt. xi: 28.

without measure, and shed His blood, and gave us the Holy Spirit.

Father Cassian used to say that all heretics would perish. I do not know about this – my trust is only in the Orthodox Church, wherein lies the joy of salvation in the humility of Christ.

I give Thee thanks, my Lord and Creator
that Thou hast mercifully humbled my soul,
and revealed unto me the way of Thy saints.
Thou lovest them that weep,
and all the saints found Thee through their tears.
Thou lovest the humble, and by Thy grace dost teach
them
the love and humility feared by our enemy, the devil.
Thou dost rejoice, O Lord, in the humble soul.
Do Thou, O Merciful One, grant that I may come to
Thee
by treading the path followed by Thy saints,
the path of humble weeping that Thou hast shewn me.

There was a novice in our Monastery who fell from a tree when he was picking olives, and both his legs were paralysed. While he was lying in hospital in the Transfiguration block the monk in the bed next to him died. The Infirmarer who was preparing the body for burial asked him to hold the needle for a moment. The sick man replied, 'Why bother me?' But after he had said this, his soul began to be troubled, and he called for a father-confessor and confessed to him his sin of unhelpfulness.

The wise man will understand why the monk's soul was troubled but he who lacks wisdom will say that it was all nonsense.

On June 1st 1932 Father Panteleimon came to see me from

Old Russikon. I asked him how he was, and with a glad face he answered,

‘I rejoice greatly.’

‘Why is that?’

‘All the brethren like me.’

‘What is it makes them like you?’

‘I do the bidding of them all, and go whenever anyone sends me anywhere,’ he said.

And I thought to myself, Easy is the way into the Kingdom of Heaven. He has found peace through obedience, which he practises for God’s sake, and therefore it is well with his soul.

Hieromonk Father I. told me how one of the monks lay mortal sick but could not die. ‘You have not confessed your sins, and so you do not die,’ they told him. ‘Twice I have made confession,’ he replied, ‘but I think my sins are not forgiven me, and I want to make my confession to Abbot Makarios.’ It was arranged as he wished – Abbot Makarios arrived from the Monastery and confessed the monk. who then quickly and peacefully breathed his last.

Hieromonk Father I. asked me why it had happened like that, and I replied that although the monk had confessed, he had not believed that his sins were forgiven him, and that it had been with him in accordance with his spiritual state – in accord, that is, with his unbelief. But we must have firm faith that everything in our Church is established by the Holy Spirit and then man receives grace from the Lord in the measure of his faith.

A Young Monk

I give Thee thanks, O Lord, that this day Thou didst send unto me Thy servant, a young monk whose name I will withhold lest he fall into vainglory, and his holy life lose worth.

We talked of love, and this young man told me that in

the course of his thirty years he had never given wilful offence to any man. I looked on him, and my soul was humbled to dust before him.

Since childhood his soul had loved God, and, contemplating the Lord in spirit, he presumed not to offend any man, and the Lord preserved him from sin on this account.

Because of such men as these, I think, the Lord must be preserving the world, for they are so pleasing unto Him, and He hearkens always to His humble servants, and all is well with the rest of us because of their prayers.

I give Thee thanks, O Lord, that Thou has shewn Thy servant unto me. And how many more saints there are whom we cannot know! But the soul perceives the approach of saints, and is transformed in the humility of the Spirit of Christ. The Divine Spirit lives in the saints, and the soul senses His advent.

O Lord, grant that all men may be like unto this young monk! The whole world would be adorned with glory, for the grace of God would then dwell abundantly in the world. The Holy Spirit gives the soul to know love of God and love for men. The Holy Spirit teaches the soul meekness and humility, and the soul is at rest in God, and forgets all the troubles of this world, for the Holy Spirit is her Comforter. The souls of the saints savour the Holy Spirit while still here on earth. That is the 'Kingdom of God' which is 'within us', as saith the Lord.*

Today Father N. and I have been discussing nobility of soul.

The soul is indeed noble, for she has received her nobility from the Lord Himself, Who, loving her, bestowed nobility on her. And we must preserve it; and we preserve it by means of that same nobility which the Lord gave the soul.

When He appeared to His disciples after the Resurrection and began to speak to the Apostle Peter, He did not rebuke

* Luke xvii: 21.

him but asked him gently, 'Lovest thou me?'^{xi}. These tender words of the Lord, full of fatherly love, teach us to act likewise when anyone wounds us. Herein lies Christ-like nobility, which passes man's understanding and is known only through the Holy Spirit.

Glory be to the Lord and His compassion in that He teaches us by the Holy Spirit, for otherwise we should not know what manner of Lord is ours!

The Eagle and the Cock

An eagle was flying high in the heavens, delighting in the beauty of the world; and he thought, 'I fly across wide expanses, and see valleys and mountains, seas and rivers, meadows and forests. I behold a multitude of wild beasts and birds. I look down upon cities and hamlets, and see how men live. But the country cock knows of nothing save his barnyard, where he sets eyes on only a handful of people and a few cattle. I will fly down and tell him of the life of the world.'

The eagle flew down on to a cottage roof, and watched the cock strutting about among his hens, and thought to himself: 'So he is content with his lot, then. But all the same, I will tell him of the things I know.'

And the eagle began telling the cock of the beauty and riches of the world. At first, the cock listened attentively but he did not understand anything, so the eagle was vexed and it became an effort to talk to the cock; while the cock, not understanding what the eagle was saying, began to weary, and found it hard to listen to the eagle. But each of them remained content with his lot.

Thus is it when an educated man talks to one who is not educated; and even more so when a spiritual man discourses with the man who is not spiritually inclined. The spiritual man is like the eagle, the other resembles the cock. The

^{xi}. John xxi: 15.

spiritual man meditates day and night on the law of the Lord, and in prayer rises towards God; whereas the mind of the indifferent man is tied to the earth, or engaged in idle thoughts. The soul of the spiritual man delights in peace, whereas the other's soul remains empty and distracted. Like the eagle, the spiritual man soars in the heights, and with his soul feels God, and beholds the whole world, though he be praying in the darkness of night; whereas the soul of the man who is not spiritual delights in vainglory or in riches, or seeks the pleasures of the flesh. And when the spiritual man meets with his opposite, their discourse is tedious and burdensome for both of them.

Conversations with Children★

Children are running about the meadow, picking flowers, singing and being happy, for the grace of God makes them glad. But now they have noticed the monk, and come up to speak to him:

‘Look,’ they say, ‘the Lord made the sky beautiful with stars, and the earth with rivers and gardens. Eagles fly high

★ During the Russo-Japanese war (1904–5) Father Silouan, as a reservist belonging to the Guards, was recalled to Russia for mobilisation, together with other Russian monks of the Holy Mountain who were in the reserves. He left the Monastery on the 30th December 1904 and returned to Athos on the 16th October 1905.

When he arrived back with his family, he built himself a small solitary cell in a field, for the sake of quiet and freedom to fulfil his monastic rule; and there it was that he spent the time of his sojourn in his Motherland. During this period of his life he would sometimes have talks with the village children who came to see him. Afterwards he would tell us of the interesting observations he had made concerning the souls of children, and how from earliest childhood the soul may specify her relations with God.

The conversations given here would appear to have their origin in those he then had with children. It is possible that the radiant image of the monk who loved them stamped itself on their pure childish souls but one cannot fail to note that, by their content, the words of the *Staretz* are within the grasp only of mature minds.

up beneath the clouds and enjoy the beauty of nature. Birds sing cheerfully but you who are a monk, you sit in your cell and do not see all God's beauty. You sit and weep. What is it you weep about in your little cell, while the sun shines, the whole world is beautiful, and there is joy the length and breadth of the earth?'

Thus the children would ask of the monk, and thus he answered them:

'Children, you do not understand my lament. My soul weeps for you, that you do not know God Who created all this beauty. My soul knows Him, and I would that every one of you had this knowledge, and so I mourn and with tears entreat God for you, that you may know the Lord through the Holy Spirit.'

'What does it mean – know the Lord through the Holy Spirit?'

'With your minds, children, you cannot come to know the Lord. But you must read the Holy Scriptures – grace lives in them and this grace will delight you, and you will come to know the Lord, and gladly work for Him day and night. You see, when you come to know the Lord, you will not want to look at the world – your souls will aspire to behold the glory of the Lord in heaven.'

'But we like the flowers, and going for walks and enjoying ourselves!'

'You like walking through the fields picking flowers. You like singing, and listening to the song of the birds; but in heaven there is something finer still – paradise, where the Lord dwells with His angels and the saints. There, too, there is rejoicing and the singing of songs, but different, nicer songs, and when the soul has heard that singing, she can never forget, and no longer cares for the songs of this earth.'

'But we like singing.'

'Sing, children, to the Lord by the Holy Spirit. Sing in humility and love.'

'But why do you cry? We don't understand.'

'I weep over you, my children. When I look at you, I feel

sorry for you, and beseech the Lord to take care of you, that you may come to know your Creator and Lord. I look at you, and lo, you resemble the boy Christ, and I want you not to lose the grace of God, and when you grow up become like the enemy, because of bad thoughts. I would have you continue always in the likeness of the Son of the Most Holy Mother of God. That is what my soul wishes for you. That is what I pray for. I am sorry for all the children on earth, and so I weep for all innocent children and orphans. I weep for the world, my children, and sorrow over all God's people.

Lord, pour forth Thy mercy on the children of the earth,
whom Thou lovest, and give them to know Thee
through the Holy Spirit,
and teach them to glorify Thee.

I beseech Thee with tears, hearken to my prayer,
and let all people come to know Thy glory by the Holy Spirit.

'Children, love God, as the Angels in heaven love Him.'

'We have never seen God, so how can we love Him?'

'My beloved little children, think of God always. Think that He loves you and has given you life that you may live with Him for ever and rejoice in His love.'

'How can we know that God loves us?'

'Love is recognised by its fruits, children. When we abide in the love of God, we fear sin, and our souls are at peace and happy, and we feel like thinking of God all the time, and we want to say our prayers, and our souls have good thoughts.'

'How can we find out what thoughts live in us, and which of them are good thoughts, and which are bad?'

'To distinguish good thoughts from evil ones, we must keep our minds pure in God.'

'But we don't understand how we are to keep our minds

in God when we have never seen Him and don't know Him. And what does a pure mind mean?'

'Little children, think like this: think that God sees you, though you do not see Him. In this way you will always walk before the face of the Lord. And though it be but small love, still, if you remember what I have told you, it will lead you to a greater love, and then through the Holy Spirit you will come to know all the things I have been saying to you, and which you do not understand yet.'

XX

Thoughts, Advice and Observations on Asceticism

My thoughts are the fruit of long years of living. God's mercies have been with me without end. And had the Lord and Good Shepherd not given me understanding through His grace, the enemy would have swallowed me up.

I write of the Lord's compassion, and an easy task it is, for my soul knows the Lord through the Holy Spirit, and knows how greatly He loves man. So great is His love and humility that He will not be mindful of our sins.

My spirit yearns, insatiable, now to pray, now to write or speak of God – of worldly matters my soul has no wish to hear tell.

If you would speak or write of God – pray and ask help and understanding of the Lord, and the Lord will forward and enlighten you. And if you are perplexed, bow down three times and say: 'O Lord, Who art merciful, Thou seest my soul is perplexed and in fear of doing wrong. Enlighten me, O Lord.' And the Lord will surely give you understanding, for He is very close to us. But if there be any doubt in you, you will not receive what you have asked for. Thus the Lord said to Peter, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt, O thou of little faith?'ⁱ when the disciple was beginning to sink in the waters. So is it with the soul that doubts – she begins to sink in wrong thoughts.

O Lord, grant us through the Holy Spirit
fulness of faith in thee.

ⁱ. Matt. xiv:31.

If a man teaches to whom it is not given to teach, he offends against the majesty of God.

There are people – great men, even – who do not seek counsel of the Lord when they are perplexed; whereas one should say in so many words, ‘Lord, I am a sinful man, and have no right understanding, but Thou, O Merciful One, do Thou shew me what to do.’ And the merciful Lord Who does not want us to be troubled in soul because of the enemy makes known to us what to do and what not to do.

If we know many things let us thank the Lord for the knowledge given to us. But knowledge by itself is not enough: the fruits of the Holy Spirit, be it but one small seed that will grow in good time and bear abundant increase, must be in the soul.

I write, and it is easy for me to write, since my soul knows the Lord. Of course, it would be better to pray without distraction, for prayer is more precious than all else. But the soul lacks the strength to pray ardently without cease, and so must be allowed rest from the effort of praying. During such times we may read or ponder or write about God. To every man as the Lord shall prompt him.

It is good to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night. In this manner the soul finds rest in God, and the Lord will wholly encompass her, and then nothing exists for her save God.

When the soul is in God the world is quite forgot, and the soul contemplates God. But at other times the Lord moves the soul by His grace to pray for the whole world – or, sometimes, to pray for one particular person. It is when and as He wills.

But in order to behold the mysteries of God, we must earnestly entreat the Lord for a humble spirit, and then we shall know His mysteries through the Holy Spirit.

Know this, that when calamity befalls a people, if but one soul should weep before God for that people, they will be spared. For this did the Holy Spirit draw nigh to the soul and give her the gift of prayer for men, that they might be spared. Thus does the Merciful Lord love His creatures.

Maybe one of you will think, However shall I pray for the whole world when I can't even pray for myself? But those who talk like that have not learned that the Lord hears our prayers and will accept them.

Pray simply, like a child, and the Lord will hear your prayer, for the Lord is so merciful a Father to us that we cannot apprehend or imagine how merciful, and the Holy Spirit alone reveals His great love for us.

The Lord gives the gift of ardent prayer for mankind to those who love the afflicted. They pray with tears for the people whom they love and for whom they grieve, and this grief of theirs is pleasing to God.

The Lord chooses out men to pray for the whole world. When Parthenios, the ascetic of Kiev, sought to know what the strict monastic observance was, the Mother of God told him, 'The monk who wears the *schema* is a man who prays for the whole world.'

The Lord would save all men, and in His goodness He summons all the world to salvation. The Lord does not take a man's will away from him but by His grace urges him towards goodness and draws him to His love. And when the Lord would have mercy on a man, He inspires others with the desire to pray for him, and helps them in their prayer. Therefore we must know that when we feel a wish to pray for someone, it means that the Lord Himself wants to shew mercy on that soul and will graciously hear our prayers. But we must not confuse the desire to pray that the Lord instils in us with the desire born of a morbid attachment to the person for whom we pray.

When prayer proceeds from pure grief for someone,

whether among the living or the dead, it holds no element of morbid attachment in it. The soul in her prayer grieves for the man and prays fervently, and this is a sign of God's mercy.

My soul has experienced and witnessed great mercies towards myself and those for whom she has prayed; and I realised that when the Lord gives us to grieve over someone, and the desire to pray for him, it means that the Lord would be gracious unto that man. Therefore, if it befalls you to sorrow over anyone, you must pray for that person, because the Lord for your sake would be gracious unto him. So do you pray then. The Lord will hear you, and you will glorify God.

When a mother knows that her children are in distress, she suffers grievously and may even fall mortally ill. And I have myself experienced something of the kind. A tree that was being felled and stripped of its branches started crashing down on the man below. I saw what was happening but my distress was so great that it prevented me from shouting to him to get out of the way. My heart felt sick and it wept, and the tree stopped in its course. I did not know the man but had it been my own flesh and blood, I think I should have died.

The prayer of the proud is not pleasing to the Lord: but when the humble man is afflicted, the Lord of a surety will hearken unto him. An old priest-monk who dwelt on the upper slopes of Mt. Athos used to see the prayers of the monks rising to heaven, and this does not surprise me. The same *staretz*, when he was a little boy and saw his father's distress over a serious drought which threatened the whole harvest, went to the kitchen-garden where hemp was growing, and started praying:

'O Lord, Thou art merciful, Thou didst create us, Thou dost feed and clothe all men. Thou seest, O Lord, how my father mourns because there is no rain. Do Thou send rain upon the earth.'

And the clouds gathered, and the rain fell and drenched the earth.

And another old monk, who lived by the sea, near the harbour, told me:

‘It was a dark night. The harbour was full of fishing-vessels. A storm blew up and quickly gathered force. The boats began to bump one against the other. The fishermen tried to tie them up but it was impossible in the darkness and the storm. Confusion reigned. The fishermen began to shout for all they were worth, and it was dreadful to hear the shouts of the terrified men. I grieved for the people and prayed with tears:

‘“Lord, hush the storm, and still the waves. Have pity and save Thine afflicted people.”’

‘And soon the storm ceased, the sea grew calm, and the people, their fears lifted, gave thanks to God.’★

I used to think the Lord only performed miracles in answer to the prayers of saints, but now I know He also performs them for the sinner the moment he humbles himself, for when a man learns humility the Lord hearkens to his prayer.

In their inexperience many people declare that such-and-such a saint performed a miracle, but I know that it is the Holy Spirit living in man Who performs the miracles. The Lord would have all men find salvation and dwell eternally with Him, and so He gives ear to the sinner’s prayer, either for the good of others or for the good of him who prays.

For those who ask for my prayers, I entreat the Lord with tears: ‘Lord, grant them Thy Holy Spirit, that through the Holy Spirit they may know Thee.’

The Lord loves us sinners without end, and He gives man the Holy Spirit, and by the Holy Spirit the soul knows the

★ Here the *Staretz* relates in the third person something that happened with himself.

Lord and is blessedly happy in Him, gives thanks to Him for the whole world, and urgently longs for all men to know God, because the Lord Himself desires this for all men. But, in truth, this is possible only through grace, even in small measure. Whereas without grace man is like a dumb animal.

O how deeply to be pitied are those who do not know God! But we Orthodox Christians are happy, for we know God. The Holy Spirit has taught us to know Him.

He teaches us, too, to love our enemies.

Until man has come to know greater things, he is content with the little he has. He is like the country cock who lives in a small yard, sees a handful of people and dumb animals, knows its dozen hens, and is satisfied with its life because it knows nothing else.

Whereas the eagle who flies high in the clouds and scans remote horizons with its sharp eye, catches from afar the scents of the earth and delights in the world's beauty; knows many lands, seas and rivers, and beholds a multitude of wild beasts and birds, would not be content were it to be set down with the cock in a small barnyard.

And man, so long as he does not know of greater things, is satisfied with the little he has. How often is the poor peasant content at having food to eat and clothing to wear, and thanks God for them. But the man of learning will not be pleased with such a life – he seeks scope for his intellect.

And it is the same in the spiritual life. The man who does not know the grace of the Holy Spirit is like the cock ignorant of the flight of the eagle – he has no understanding of the moving sweetness of the love of God. He learns God from nature and the Scriptures. He contents himself with precept, in the same way as the cock is satisfied with its lot and finds it no affliction not to be an eagle.

But he who has come to know the Lord by the Holy Spirit prays day and night because the grace of the Holy Spirit makes him want to love the Lord, and from the sweetness of the love of God he lightly bears all the afflictions of

the earth, and his soul yearns unceasingly after God alone and ever seeks the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Let the man who wishes to pray without ceasing be sober in all things and obedient to the *staretz* he waits upon. He should make clean confession, and reflect that the Lord guides both his spiritual father and his *staretz*, and then he will have no bad thoughts against them. In return for his holy obedience good thoughts proceeding from grace will instruct him, and he will progress in Christ-like humility. But if he begins to think, 'I have no need to seek counsel of anyone,' and forsakes obedience, he will become hot-livered, and not only will not thrive but will lose prayer.

If you would hold on to prayer, you must love those who offend against you, and pray for them until your soul is reconciled to them, and then the Lord will give you prayer without cease, for He giveth prayer to those who pray for their enemies.

In prayer, our teacher is the Lord Himself, but we must seek to humble our souls. He who prays aright has the peace of God in his soul. The man of prayer should feel tenderly towards every living thing. The man of prayer loves all men and has compassion for all, for the grace of the Holy Spirit has taught him love.

Prayer is the gift of the Holy Spirit. With might and main the devil tries to turn man from letting his thoughts dwell in God, and from prayer. But the soul that loves God yearns after God, and straightly prays to him, 'My soul yearns after Thee, and I seek Thee in tears.'

The heart of the man who prays, prays without being constrained to: grace itself works prayer in the heart. But do you humble yourself as much as can be – keep your mind in your heart and in hell. The more you humble yourself, the greater the gifts you will receive from God.

Glory be to the Lord's tender mercy that allows us sinners to dwell in God!

If you would dwell in God, be content with what you have, even though you may have nothing. Be content and give thanks to God that you have nothing. Be content to serve God, and He will set you among the Saints.

If you would love the Lord, you must love your enemies and be without malice. The Lord will then give you the joy of praising Him day and night, and you will forget the world, and should you return and remember, you will fervently pray for the whole world.

This is the way the Saints lived, for the spirit of God teaches the soul to pray for mankind.

The Holy Spirit teaches us to love God, and love keeps the commandments. The Lord said, 'If a man love me, he will keep my commandments.'ⁱⁱ Had Adam loved the Lord as the Mother of God loved Him, he would have obeyed God's command. And we see from experience that the mind of the man who loves God is guided by God's grace and is keenly alive to the snares of the enemy. And when the Lord comforteth the soul, she then no longer sees the enemy but contemplates the Lord alone.

The man who is obedient to God's law will understand how amiable are all the commandments of the Lord. Consider any one of the commandments – it holds out joy and gladness. Take the first – to love God. If you reflect that the Lord loves us, for this your thought, peace will be given you. Take the second commandment – to love thy neighbour. If you think that the Lord loves His people, and that in them lives the Holy Spirit, the law of God will make glad your soul, and you will pursue this law day and night, and the gift of discernment of good and evil will be yours.

ⁱⁱ cf. John xiv:15–23.

When the Lord would comfort an afflicted soul, He gives her joy, tears, tenderness and peace of mind and body; and sometimes Himself appears to her.

The Apostles beheld the Lord in glory when He was transfigured on Mount Tabor, but later, at the time of His suffering, were faint-hearted and ran away. So weak and frail is man! In very truth we are but earth – and sinful earth at that. That is why the Lord said, ‘Without me ye can do nothing.’ⁱⁱⁱ And thus it is. When grace is in us, we are truly humble, wise, compliant, meek and pleasing to God and man; but when we lose grace, we wither away like a shoot cut from the vine.

The man who does not love his brother, for whom the Lord died in great suffering, has fallen from the Vine (which is the Lord); but the man who wrestles against sin, the Lord will help.

Man is sometimes so infirm and weak that he lacks the strength even to brush off a fly, and is unable to drive evil thoughts from his soul, but in this state of weakness, too, God’s mercy preserves him, and not evil thoughts but God alone will be in his soul, in his mind, everywhere.

Man by himself is frail as the flowers of the field – beloved of all and trampled underfoot by all.

So it is with man: sometimes he is in good repute, sometimes dishonoured. But the man who loves God gives thanks to the Lord for all his sorrows, and continues tranquil whether he be held in honour or disgrace.

It is my belief that one must eat just so much that after a meal one feels like praying – eat in such wise that one’s spirit perpetually burns and reaches out insatiable towards God, day and night. We must live simply, like little children. Then the grace of God will always be in the soul. Where there is

ⁱⁱⁱ John xv:5.

love, the Lord gives freely of grace, and by this grace the soul dwells, as it were, in another world, and is drawn thither by the love of God, so wholly that she has no wish to look upon this earth , though she may love it.

How can I know whether the Lord loves me or not?

Here are some signs: If you battle firmly against sin, the Lord loves you. If you love your enemies you are even more beloved of God. And if you lay down your life for others, you are greatly beloved of the Lord, Who Himself laid down His life for us.

I used not to know what was meant by a diseased soul, but now I see precisely, both in myself and in others. When the soul humbles herself and submits to the will of God, she regains her health and is tranquil and quiet in the Lord, and out of joy therefrom she prays that all men may know the Lord by the Holy Spirit, Who is clear witness to the soul of salvation.

‘The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.’^{iv}.

Day and night the monk studies the law of the Lord, and likewise day and night wages constant war against the enemy. He has seven fortresses to take.

The first fortress is to excise his own will.

The second – to give himself over in obedience to his *staretz*.

The third fortress – to mortify his flesh for God’s sake.

The fourth fortress – to embrace poverty.

The fifth fortress – to overcome self-love.

The sixth fortress – to humble himself.

The seventh fortress – to surrender his soul to God. That is to say, to submit in all things to the will of God.

^{iv}. Ps. xiv:2.

Now let us look and see what are the rewards which the monk receives from the Lord, even here on earth, for his victories.

First, a quiet conscience. Secondly, peace from the Lord for soul and body. Thirdly, he loves God, and, contemplating Him, reflects that the Lord loves us. Fourthly, because of his love for God he loves his neighbour too, as himself. Fifthly, the soul finds rest in God and contemplates the greatness and compassion of God. Sixthly, he walks the earth and works with his hands, but his mind is attached to God and in contemplation of Him forgets the earth, for the love of God draws the soul to love the Beloved. Seventhly, in the thoughts of his soul he feels the grace of God. Eighthly, he is aware of grace in his heart. Ninthly, he feels the grace of God in his body, too. Tenthly, because of his love of God the Kingdom of Heaven is revealed to him, and through the Holy Spirit he knows what a Lord is ours.

O you who read me – forgive me for everything, for all my errors, and I beseech you – pray for me!

I have written because of my insatiable love for God. I sat, and my whole soul was taken up with God, and no other thought came nigh to hinder my mind from writing of the beloved Lord. And as I pen one word, I as yet know not the next, until it is born within me and I can write it down, too. But when I stop writing, thoughts and impressions come to harass my poor, feeble mind; and then I cry aloud to the Merciful Lord, and the Lord has compassion on me, His fallen creature.

Reflections on Departing this Life

My body lies on the ground but my spirit aspires to behold the Lord in glory. Though I am a most sinful man, the Lord suffered me to know Him by the Holy Spirit, and my soul knows Him – knows how immeasurably merciful He is, and how joyous.

Until the coming of God's grace, the soul fears death. And she fears God Himself because she does not know how humble and meek and merciful He is. And there is no man can apprehend the love of Christ if he has not tasted of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Beloved brethren in the Lord, the merciful Lord is my soul's witness that I write of the truth. And know, my brethren – let no one deceive himself – he who does not love his brother does not love God either. The Scriptures speak rightly concerning this: fulfil them word for word, and you will behold in your own soul the mercy of the Lord, which will captivate your soul, for sweet is the Lord's grace.

The young man seeks a bride for himself, and the maiden looks for a bridegroom. This is the earthly order of life, blessed by God. But the soul chosen of the Lord for Himself, the soul He suffers to taste of the sweetness of the love of God, does not set earthly life on a par with the love of God – she is absorbed in God alone, and attaches herself to no earthly thing. And if earthly thoughts come to her, she takes no delight in them, for she cannot love the things of this earth – all her longing is for the things of heaven.

Sick at heart, the Mother of God and St. Joseph sought Christ when He tarried behind in Jerusalem, discoursing in the temple with the elders; and it was only after three days that they found Him.

How grievously did the Mother of God sorrow during those three days! 'Where art Thou, my beloved Son? Where art Thou, my precious Light? Where art Thou, beloved fruit of my womb?' she mourned.

Likewise must every soul seek the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin, till she finds Him.

In death the soul that has come to know the love of God through the Holy Spirit experiences a measure of dread when the angels bring her before the Lord, since while living in

the world she was guilty of sin. But when the soul beholds the Lord, she rejoices in His meek and merciful countenance, and the Lord in the abundance of His gentleness and love remembereth not her sins. One glance at the Lord, and love of Him will take up its abode in the soul, and from love of God and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit she will be all transformed.

Our fathers have passed from earth to heaven. What do they do there? They dwell in the love of God and contemplate the beauty of His countenance. The beauty of the Lord enthralls every soul in joy and love. This beauty is made known on earth, too, though only in part, for our frail bodies are unable to bear perfect love. On earth the Lord gives the soul as much as she is able to contain, and as much as His loving-kindness wills.

My soul is nigh unto death and longs with a great longing to behold the Lord and be with Him for ever.

The Lord has forgiven me my many sins, and by the Holy Spirit has suffered me to know how greatly He loves mankind.

All heaven is in wonder at the Lord's Incarnation – at how the Mighty Lord came down to save us sinners, and by His sufferings won for us eternal rest; and the soul has no wish to think on any earthly thing, but is drawn thither where the Lord is.

Dear to the heart are the words of the Lord when the Holy Spirit gives understanding to the soul. A multitude of people followed after Him when He lived on earth, and for many days they were unable to tear themselves from Him but, hungry, listened to His sweet words.

The soul loves the Lord, and everything that hinders her from thinking of God makes her sad. And if here on earth the soul so deeply delights in the Holy Spirit, how much more will she delight there in the other world!

O Lord, how Thou hast loved Thy creature!
Thy soft, gentle gaze the soul can never forget.

All day, all night, my soul is taken up with Thee, O Lord,
and I seek Thee. Thy Spirit draweth me to seek Thee,
and the remembrance of Thee makes glad my mind.
My soul came to love Thee,
and rejoices that Thou art my God and my Lord,
and I yearn after Thee till my heart is filled with tears.
And though all the world be beautiful,
no earthly thing can occupy my thoughts –
my soul desires only the Lord.

There is nought on earth can satisfy the soul that has come
to know God. She longs continually for the Lord, and, like
a child that has lost its mother, cries:

‘My soul yearns after Thee, and I seek Thee in tears.’

The soul from love of the Lord has lost her wits, as it were.
She sits in silence, with no wish to speak, and looks upon
the world with crazed eyes, having no desire for it and seeing
it not. And people do not know that she is contemplating
her beloved Lord, that the world has been left behind and is
forgotten, and the soul does not care to let her thoughts rest
on it, for there is no sweetness therein.

Thus is it with the soul that has come to know the sweet-
ness of the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, give unto us this love
throughout Thine whole universe!

O Holy Spirit, live in our souls,
that with one accord
we may all glorify the Creator,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

AMEN